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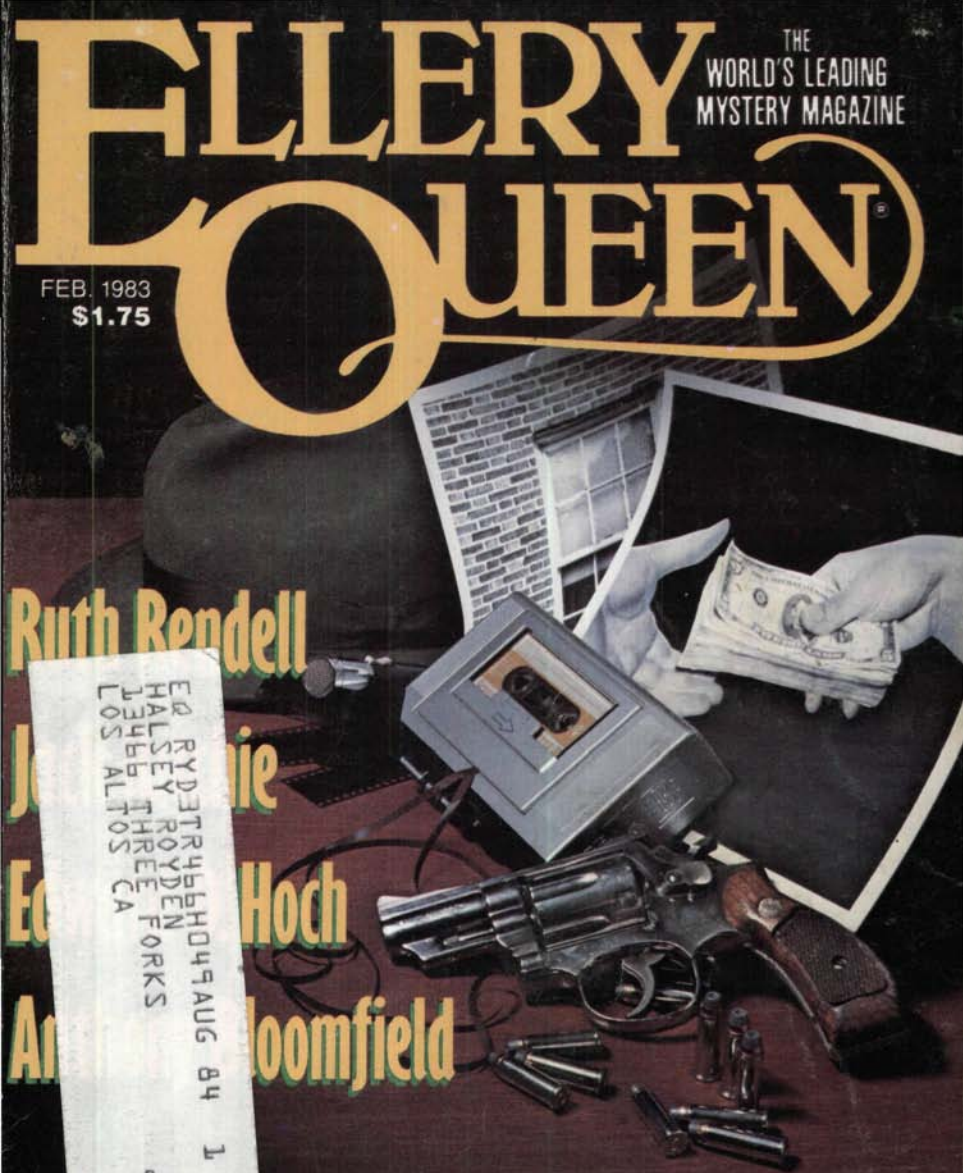

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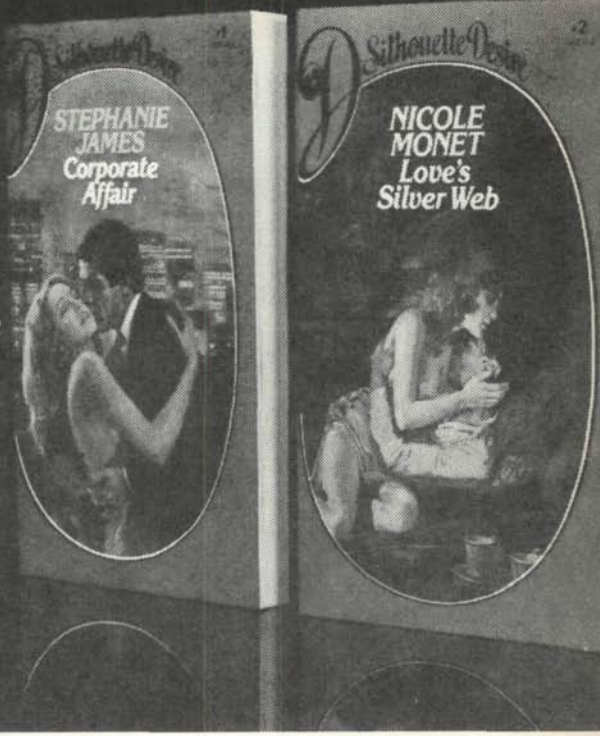

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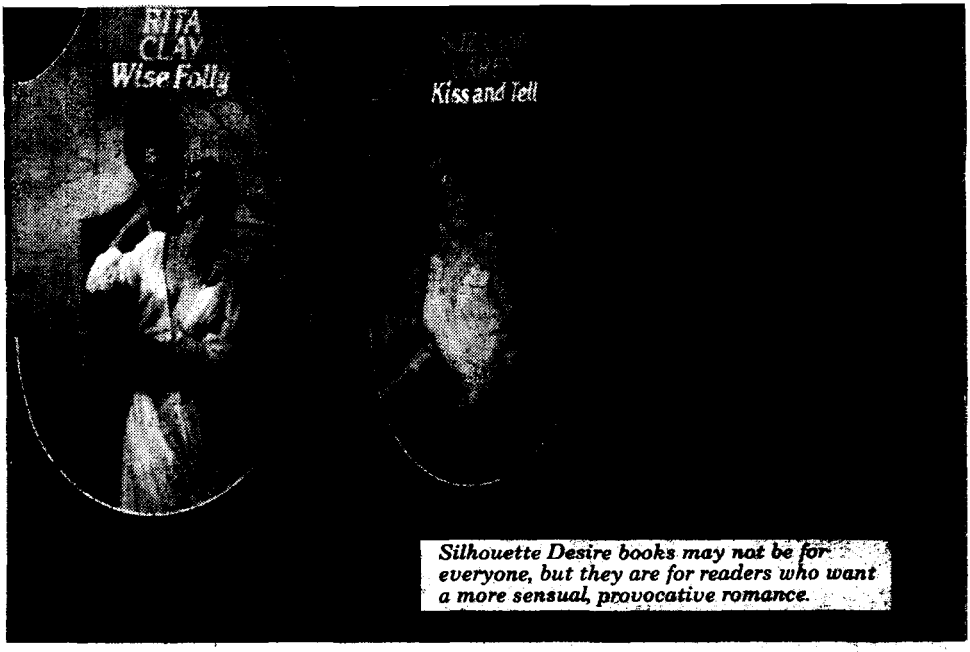
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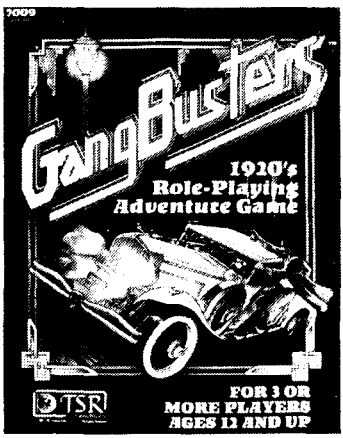

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a ***NEW*** short story by

RUTH RENDELL

While Grandfather was alive, Colin and his mother had no choice but to put up with the antlers and tusks that sprouted everywhere out of the walls, the elephant's-foot umbrella stand, and the snarling maws of tigris *and* ursa. *They had to grin and bear it, as Mother, who had a fine turn of wit, put it.*

But when Grandfather was at last gathered to his ancestors, they took down those heads and horns and packed them in trunks. The fur rugs they did not disturb. These days they were worth a fortune and Colin felt that the tiger skins scattered across the hall parquet, the snow leopard draped across the back of the sofa, and the bear into whose fur one could bury one's toes before the fire gave the place a luxurious look . . .

LOOPY

by RUTH RENDELL

At the end of the last performance, after the curtain calls, Red Riding Hood put me on a lead and with the rest of the company we went across to the pub. No one had taken makeup off or changed, there was no time for that before the George closed. I remember prancing across the road and growling at someone on a bicycle.

They loved me in the pub—well, some of them loved me. Quite a lot were embarrassed. The funny thing was that I should have been embarrassed myself if I had been one of them. I should have ignored *me* and drunk up my drink and left. Except that it is unlikely I would have been in a pub at all. Normally, I never went near such places. But inside the wolf skin it was very different, everything was different in there.

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I prowled about for a while, sometimes on all-fours—though this isn't easy for us who are accustomed to the upright stance—sometimes loping, with my forepaws held close up to my chest. I went over to tables where people were sitting and snuffled my snout at their packets of crisps. If they were smoking I growled and waved my paws in air-clearing gestures. Lots of them were forthcoming, stroking me and making jokes or pretending terror at my red jaws and wicked little eyes. There was even one lady who took hold of my head and laid it in her lap.

Bounding up to the bar to collect my small dry sherry, I heard Bill Harkness (the First Woodcutter) say to Susan Hayes (Red Riding Hood's Mother): "Old Colin's really come out of his shell tonight."

And Susan, bless her, said, "He's a real actor, isn't he?"

I was one of the few members of our company who was. I expect this is always true in amateur dramatics. There are one or two real actors, people who could have made their livings on the stage if it wasn't so overcrowded a profession, and the rest who just come for the fun of it and the social side.

Did I ever consider the stage seriously? My father had been a civil servant, both my grandfathers in the ICS. As far back as I can remember it was taken for granted I should get my degree and go into the Civil Service. I never questioned it. If you have a mother like mine, one in a million, more a friend than a parent, you never feel the need to rebel. Besides, Mother gave me all the support I could have wished for in my acting. Acting as a hobby, that is. For instance, though the company made provision for hiring all the more complicated costumes for that year's Christmas pantomime, Mother made the wolf suit for me herself. It was ten times better than anything we could have hired. The head we had to buy, but the body and the limbs she made from a long-haired grey-fur fabric such as is manufactured for ladies' coats.

Moira used to say I enjoyed acting so much because it enabled me to lose myself and become, for a while, someone else. She said I disliked what I was and looked for ways of escape. A strange way to talk to the man you intend to marry! But before I approach the subject of Moira or, indeed, continue with this account, I should explain what its purpose is.

The psychiatrist attached to this place or who visits it (I'm not entirely clear which), one Dr. Vernon-Peak, has asked me to write down some of my feelings and impressions. That, I said, would only be possible in the context of a narrative. Very well, he said, he had

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no objection. What will become of it when finished I hardly know. Will it constitute a statement to be used in court? Or will it enter Dr. Vernon-Peak's files as another case history? It's all the same to me. I can only tell the truth.

After the George closed, then, we took off our makeup and changed and went our several ways home. Mother was waiting up for me. This was not invariably her habit. If I told her I should be late and to go to bed at her usual time she always did so. But I, quite naturally, was not averse to a welcome when I got home, particularly after a triumph like that one. Besides, I had been looking forward to telling her what an amusing time I'd had in the pub.

Our house is late-Victorian, double-fronted, of grey limestone, by no means beautiful, but a comfortable, well built place. My grandfather bought it when he retired and came home from India in 1920. Mother was ten at the time, so she has spent most of her life in that house.

Grandfather was quite a famous shot and used to go big-game hunting before that kind of thing became, and rightly so, very much frowned upon. The result was that the place was full of "trophies of the chase." While Grandfather was alive, and he lived to a great age, we had no choice but to put up with the antlers and tusks that sprouted everywhere out of the walls, the elephant's-foot umbrella stand, and the snarling maws of *tigris* and *ursa*. We had to grin and bear it, as Mother, who has a fine turn of wit, used to put it.

But when Grandfather was at last gathered to his ancestors, reverently and without the least disrespect to him, we took down all those heads and horns and packed them away in trunks. The fur rugs, however, we didn't disturb. These days they are worth a fortune and I always felt that the tiger skins scattered across the hall parquet, the snow leopard draped across the back of the sofa, and the bear into whose fur one could bury one's toes before the fire gave to the place a luxurious look. I took off my shoes and snuggled my toes in it that night.

Mother, of course, had been to see the show. She had come on the first night and seen me make my onslaught on Red Riding Hood, an attack so sudden and unexpected that the whole audience had jumped to its feet and gasped. (In our version we didn't have the wolf actually devour Red Riding Hood. Unanimously, we agreed this would hardly have been the thing at Christmas.) Mother, however, wanted to see me wearing her creation once more, so I put it on and did some prancing and growling for her benefit. Again I noticed how

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curiously uninhibited I became once inside the wolf skin. For instance, I bounded up to the snow leopard and began snarling at it. I boxed at its great grey-white face and made playful bites at its ears. Down on all-fours I went and pounced on the bear, fighting it, actually forcing its neck within the space of my jaws.

How Mother laughed! She said it was as good as anything in the pantomime and a good deal better than anything they put on television.

"Animal crackers in my soup," she said, wiping her eyes. "There used to be a song that went like that in my youth. How did it go on? Something about lions and tigers loop the loop."

"Well, *lupus* means a wolf in Latin," I said.

"And you're certainly loopy! When you put that suit on again I shall have to say you're going all loopy again!"

When I put that suit on again? Did I intend to put it on again? I had not really thought about it. Yes, perhaps if I ever went to a fancy-dress party—a remote enough contingency. Yet what a shame it seemed to waste it, to pack it away like Grandfather's tusks and antlers after all the labor Mother had put into it. That night I hung it up in my wardrobe and I remember how strange I felt when I took it off that second time, more naked than I usually felt without my clothes, almost as if I had taken off my skin.

Life kept to the "even tenor" of its way. I felt a little flat with no rehearsals to attend and no lines to learn. Christmas came. Traditionally, Mother and I were alone on the Day itself, we would not have had it any other way, but on Boxing Day Moira arrived and Mother invited a couple of neighbors of ours in as well. At some stage, I seem to recall, Susan Hayes dropped in with her husband to wish us the compliments of the season.

Moira and I had been engaged for three years. We would have got married some time before, there was no question of our not being able to afford to marry, but a difficulty had arisen over where we should live. I think I may say in all fairness that the difficulty was entirely of Moira's making. No mother could have been more welcoming to a future daughter-in-law than mine. She actually wanted us to live with her at Simla House—she said we must think of it as our home and of her simply as our housekeeper. But Moira wanted us to buy a place of our own, so we had reached a deadlock, an impasse.

It was unfortunate that on that Boxing Day, after the others had gone, Moira brought the subject up again. Her brother (an estate

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agent) had told her of a bungalow for sale halfway between Simla House and her parents' home that was what he called "a real snip." Fortunately, *I* thought, Mother managed to turn the conversation by telling us about the bungalow she and her parents had lived in in India, with its great collonaded veranda, its English flower garden, and its peepul tree. But Moira interrupted her.

"This is *our* future we're talking about, not your past. I thought Colin and I were getting married."

Mother was quite alarmed. "Aren't you? Surely Colin hasn't broken things off?"

"I suppose you don't consider the possibility *I* might break things off?"

Poor Mother couldn't help smiling at that. She smiled to cover her hurt. Moira could upset her very easily. For some reason this made Moira angry.

"I'm too old and unattractive to have any choice in the matter, is that what you mean?"

"Moira," I said.

She took no notice. "You may not realize it," she said, "but marrying me will be the making of Colin. It's what he needs to make a man of him."

It must have slipped out before Mother quite knew what she was saying. She patted Moira's knee. "I can quite see it may be a tough assignment, dear."

There was no quarrel. Mother would never have allowed herself to be drawn into that. But Moira became very huffy and said she wanted to go home, so I had to get the car out and take her.

All the way to her parents' house I had to listen to a catalogue of her wrongs at my hands and my mother's. By the time we parted I felt dispirited and nervous. I even wondered if I was doing the right thing, contemplating matrimony in the "sere and yellow leaf" of forty-two.

Mother had cleared the things away and gone to bed. I went into my bedroom and began undressing. Opening the wardrobe to hang up my tweed trousers, I caught sight of the wolf suit and on some impulse I put it on.

Once inside the wolf I felt calmer and, yes, happier. I sat down in an armchair but after a while I found it more comfortable to crouch, then lie stretched out on the floor. Lying there, basking in the warmth from the gas fire on my belly and paws, I found myself remembering tales of man's affinity with wolves, Romulus and Re-

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mus suckled by a she-wolf, the ancient myth of the werewolf, abandoned children reared by wolves even in these modern times. All this seemed to deflect my mind from the discord between Moira and my mother and I was able to go to bed reasonably happily and to sleep well.

Perhaps, then, it will not seem so very strange and wonderful that the next time I felt depressed I put the suit on again. Mother was out, so I was able to have the freedom of the whole house, not just of my room. It was dusk at four, but instead of putting the lights on I prowled about the house in the twilight, sometimes catching sight of my lean grey form in the many large mirrors Mother is so fond of. Because there was so little light and our house is crammed with bulky furniture and knickknacks, the reflection I saw looked not like a man disguised but like a real wolf that has somehow escaped and strayed into a cluttered Victorian room. Or a werewolf, that animal part of man's personality that detaches itself and wanders free while leaving behind the depleted human shape.

I crept up upon the teakwood carving of the antelope and devoured the little creature before it knew what had attacked it. I resumed my battle with the bear and we struggled in front of the fireplace, locked in a desperate hairy embrace. It was then that I heard Mother let herself in at the back door. Time had passed more quickly than I had thought. I escaped and whisked my hind paws and tail round the bend in the stairs just before she came into the hall.

Dr. Vernon-Peak seems to want to know why I began this at the age of forty-two, or rather why I had not done it before. I wish I knew. Of course, there is the simple solution that I didn't have a wolf skin before, but that is not the whole answer. Was it perhaps that until then I didn't know what my needs were, though partially I had satisfied them by playing the parts I was given in dramatic productions?

There is one other thing. I have told him that I recall, as a very young child, having a close relationship with some large animal, a dog perhaps or a pony, though a search conducted into family history by this same assiduous Vernon-Peak has yielded no evidence that we ever kept a pet. But more of this anon.

Be that as it may, once I had lived inside the wolf I felt the need to do so more and more. Erect on my hind legs, drawn up to my full height, I do not think I flatter myself unduly when I say I made a fine handsome animal. And having written that, I realize that I have not yet described the wolf suit, taking for granted, I suppose,

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that those who see this document will also see it. Yet this may not be the case. They have refused to let *me* see it, which makes me wonder if it has been cleaned and made presentable again or if it is still—but, no, there is no point in going into unsavory details.

I have said that the body and limbs of the suit were made of long-haired grey-fur fabric. The stuff of it was coarse, hardly an attractive material for a coat, I should have thought, but very closely similar to a wolf's pelt. Mother made the paws after the fashion of fur gloves but with the padded and stiffened fingers of a pair of leather gloves for the claws. The head we bought from a jokes-and-games shop. It had tall prick ears, small yellow eyes, and a wonderful, half open mouth—red, voracious-looking, and with a double row of white fangs. The opening for me to breathe through was just beneath the lower jaw where the head joined the powerful hairy throat.

As Spring came I would sometimes drive out into the countryside, park the car, and slip into the skin. It was far from my ambition to be seen by anyone. I sought solitude. Whether I should have cared for a "beastly" companion, that is something else again. At that time I wanted merely to wander in the woods and copses or along a hedgerow in my wolf's persona. And this I did, choosing unfrequented places, avoiding anywhere that I might come in contact with the human race.

I am trying, in writing this, to explain how I felt. Principally, I felt *not human*. And to be not human is to be without human responsibilities and human cares. Inside the wolf, I laid aside my apprehensiveness about getting married, my apprehensiveness about *not* getting married, my fear of leaving Mother on her own, my justifiable resentment at not getting the leading part in our new production. All this got left behind with the depleted sleeping man I left behind to become a happy mindless wild creature.

Our wedding had once again been postponed. The purchase of the house Moira and I had finally agreed upon fell through at the last moment. I cannot say I was altogether sorry. It was near enough to my home, in the same street in fact as Simla House, but I had begun to wonder how I would feel passing our dear old house every day knowing it was not under that familiar roof I should lay my head.

Moira was very upset.

Yet, "I won't live in the same house as your mother even for three months," she said in answer to my suggestion. "That's a certain recipe for disaster."

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"Mother and Daddy lived with Mother's parents for twenty years," I said.

"Yes, and look at the result!" It was then that she made that remark about my enjoying playing parts because I disliked my real self.

There was nothing more to be said except that we must keep on house-hunting.

"We can still go to Malta, I suppose," Moira said. "We don't have to cancel that."

Perhaps, but it would be no honeymoon. Anticipating the delights of matrimony was something I had not done up till then and had no intention of doing. And I was on my guard when Moira—Mother was out at her bridge evening—insisted on going up to my bedroom with me, ostensibly to check on the shade of the suit I had bought to get married in. She said she wanted to buy me a tie. Once there, she reclined on my bed, cajoling me to come and sit beside her.

I suppose it was because I was feeling depressed that I put on the wolf skin. I took off my jacket—but nothing more, of course, in front of Moira—stepped into the wolf skin, fastened it up, and adjusted the head. She watched me. She had seen me in it when she came to the pantomime.

"Why have you put that on?"

I said nothing. What could I have said? The usual contentment filled me, though, and I found myself obeying her command, loping across to the bed where she was. It seemed to come naturally to fawn on her, to rub my great prick-eared head against her breast, to enclose her hands with my paws. All kinds of fantasies filled my wolfish mind and they were of an intense piercing sweetness. If we had been on our holiday then, I do not think moral resolutions would have held me back.

But unlike the lady in the George, Moira did not take hold of my head and lay it in her lap. She jumped up and shouted at me to stop this nonsense, stop it at once, she hated it. So I did as I was told, of course I did, and got sadly out of the skin and hung it back in the cupboard. I took Moira home. On our way we called in at her brother's and looked at fresh lists of houses.

It was on one of these that we eventually settled after another month or so of picking and choosing and stalling, and we fixed our wedding for the middle of December. During the summer the company had done *Blithe Spirit* (in which I had the meager part of Dr. Bradman, Bill Harkness being Charles Condomine) and the pan-

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tomime this year was *Cinderella* with Susan Hayes in the name part and me as the Elder of the Ugly Sisters. I had calculated I should be back from my honeymoon just in time.

No doubt I would have been. No doubt I would have married and gone away on my honeymoon and come back to play my comic part had I not agreed to go shopping with Moira on her birthday. What happened that day changed everything.

It was a Thursday evening. The stores in the West End stay open late on Thursdays. We left our offices at five, met by arrangement and together walked up Bond Street. The last thing I had in view was that we should begin bickering again, though we had seemed to do little else lately. It started with my mentioning our honeymoon. We were outside Asprey's, walking along arm-in-arm. Since our house wouldn't be ready for us to move into till the middle of January, I suggested we should go back for just two weeks to Simla House. We should be going there for Christmas in any case.

"I thought we'd decided to go to a hotel," Moira said.

"Don't you think that's rather a waste of money?"

"I think," she said in a grim sort of tone, "I think it's money we daren't not spend," and she drew her arm away from mine.

I asked her what on earth she meant.

"Once get you back there with Mummy and you'll never move."

I treated that with the contempt it deserved and said nothing. We walked along in silence. Then Moira began talking in a low monotone, using expressions from paperback psychology which I'm glad to say I have never heard from Dr. Vernon-Peak. We crossed the street and entered Selfridge's. Moira was still going on about Oedipus complexes and that nonsense about making a man of me.

"Keep your voice down," I said. "Everyone can hear you."

She shouted at me to shut up, she would say what she pleased. Well, she had repeatedly told me to be a man and to assert myself, so I did just that. I went up to one of the counters, wrote her a check for, I must admit, a good deal more than I had originally meant to give her, put it into her hands, and walked off, leaving her there.

For a while I felt not displeased with myself, but on the way home in the train depression set in. I should have liked to tell Mother about it but Mother would be out, playing bridge. So I took recourse in my other source of comfort, my wolf skin. The phone rang several times while I was gamboling about the rooms but I didn't answer it. I knew it was Moira. I was on the floor with Grandfather's stuffed eagle in my paws and my teeth in its neck when Mother walked in.

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Bridge had ended early. One of the ladies had been taken ill and rushed to the hospital. I had been too intent on my task to see the light come on or hear the door. She stood there in her old fur coat, looking at me. I let the eagle fall and bowed my head—I wanted to die I was so ashamed and embarrassed. How little I really knew my mother! My dear faithful companion, my only friend! Might I not say, my other self?

She smiled. I could hardly believe it but she was smiling. It was that wonderful, conspiratorial, rather naughty smile of hers. "Hallo," she said. "Are you going all loopy?"

In a moment she was down on her knees beside me, the fur coat enveloping her, and together we worried at the eagle, engaged in battle with the bear, attacked the antelope. Together we bounded into the hall to pounce upon the sleeping tigers. Mother kept laughing (and growling too) saying, "What a relief, what a relief!" I think we embraced.

Next day when I got home she was waiting for me, transformed and ready. She had made herself an animal suit. She must have worked on it all day, out of the snow-leopard skin and a length of white-fur fabric. I could see her eyes dancing through the gap in its throat.

"You don't know how I've longed to be an animal again," she said. "I used to be animals when you were a baby. I was a dog for a long time and then I was a bear, but your father found out and he didn't like it. I had to stop."

So that was what I dimly remembered. I said she looked like the Queen of the Beasts.

"Do I, Loopy?" she said.

We had a wonderful weekend, Mother and I. Wolf and leopard, we breakfasted together that morning. Then we played. We played all over the house, sometimes fighting, sometimes dancing, hunting of course, carrying off our prey to the lairs we made for ourselves among the furniture. We went out in the car, drove into the country, and there in a wood got into our skins and for many happy hours roamed wild among the trees.

There seemed no reason, during those two days, to become human again at all, but on the Tuesday I had a rehearsal and on the Monday morning I had to go off to work. It was coming down to earth, back to what we call reality, with a nasty bang. Still, it had its amusing side too. A lady in the train trod on my toe and I had growled at her before I remembered and turned it into a cough.

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All through that weekend neither of us had bothered to answer the phone. In the office I had no choice and it was there that Moira caught me. Marriage had come to seem remote, something grotesque, something that others did, not me. Animals do not marry. But that was not the sort of thing I could say to Moira. I promised to ring her. I said we must meet before the week was out.

I suppose she did tell me she'd come over on the Thursday evening and show me what she'd bought with the money I had given her. She knew Mother was always out on Thursdays. I suppose Moira did tell me and I failed to take it in. Nothing was important to me but being animals with Mother—Loopy and the Queen of the Beasts.

Each night as soon as I got home we made ourselves ready for our evening's games. How harmless it all was! How innocent! Like the gentle creatures in the dawn of the world before man came. Like the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been sent away.

The lady who had been taken ill at the bridge evening had since died, so this week it was cancelled. But would Mother have gone anyway? Probably not. Our animal capers meant as much to her as they did to me, almost more perhaps, for she had denied herself so long.

We were sitting at the dining table, eating our evening meal. Mother had cooked, I recall, a rack of lamb so that we might later gnaw the bones. We never ate it, of course, and I have since wondered what became of it. But we did begin on our soup. The bread was at my end of the table, with the bread board and the long sharp knife.

Moira, when she called and I was alone, was in the habit of letting herself in by the back door. We did not hear her, neither of us heard her, though I do remember Mother's noble head lifted a fraction before Moira came in, her fangs bared and her ears pricked. Moira opened the dining-room door and walked in. I can see her now, the complacent smile on her lips fading and the scream starting to come. She was wearing what must have been my present, a full-length white sheepskin coat.

And then? This is what Dr. Vernon-Peak will particularly wish to know but what I cannot clearly remember. I remember that as the door opened I was holding the bread knife in my paws. I think I remember letting out a low growling and poising myself to spring. But what came after?

The last things I can recall before they brought me here are the blood on my fur and the two wild predatory creatures crouched on the floor over the body of the lamb.

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a *NEW* MR. STRANG story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

When Charlie Unsinger was in Mr. Strang's chemistry class at Aldershot High, he had come to see the teacher after school to argue his own theory about Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter." Now, 25 years later, he had stopped by for Mr. Strang's advice about a purloined-letter problem of his own . . .

MR. STRANG AND THE PURLOINED MEMO

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

The end of the school day was only minutes away, and Mr. Strang had just polished off the last of a set of general-science lab notes he was correcting when he heard a tapping at the door of the faculty room. "Yes," the gnomelike science teacher called imperiously, "what is it?"

He fully expected a student aide to peer fearfully around the half open door and blurt out some message, quickly pulling the door closed again. The Aldershot High School faculty room was the last bastion of teacher privilege in the entire building, and students were barred from it under any and all circumstances. Mr. Strang fully intended to keep it that way.

The man who entered was wearing a dark-blue overcoat, unbuttoned, and a suit with matching vest. His hair was tinged with gray, and his face had a deep tan which, during this winter season, bespoke a recent trip to a warmer climate. "They told me in the office I'd find you here," he said. "Do you remember me, Mr. Strang?"

Mr. Strang shook hands tentatively. "I don't believe I—"

"It's been twenty-five years," the man replied, "but maybe I can

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refresh your memory. Think of sketches of Sherlock Holmes drawn in the margins of my chemistry experiments—the quote from Agatha Christie that began my report on alkaloid poisons—the Ellery Queen paperback you found me reading behind my open textbook."

"Charlie!" cried Mr. Strang with a broad smile of recognition. "Charlie Unsinger, as I live and breathe." And then the teacher shook his head ruefully. "You know, with all the time you spent reading detective stories when you should have been studying chemistry, you almost failed the course."

"Yeah, I remember your reminding me of that about every other day," Unsinger replied. "But I also remember you were almost as interested in them as I was."

"Oh, it was just a hobby."

"How about that time I came to see you after school—when you thought I wanted extra help."

Mr. Strang chuckled. "And all you wanted to do was talk about Poe's 'The Purloined Letter.' You'd just read it in English class."

"It was my theory," said Unsinger with mock pomposity, "that such a thing could never happen in real life; that a thorough search by trained police was bound to turn up the letter."

"I, on the other hand," the teacher added, "held that the method employed by the evil Minister D—— to conceal the letter might well confound Police Prefect G—— and his men, or modern-day police, for that matter. Charlie, it's been a quarter of a century, but I'm prepared to carry on our debate if you still feel—"

Unsinger shook his head ruefully. "I concede defeat, Mr. Strang," he said. "You see, I've got a real one."

"A real one? A real what, Charlie?"

"A real purloined-letter problem. And I want you to make like C. Auguste Dupin and solve it for me."

"Me? But—"

"Mr. Strang, even as a kid I was amazed at the way you could take a bunch of odd facts and make them add up to some logical conclusion. And now—well, my purloined letter isn't anywhere near as glamorous as the one in Poe's story, but all the elements are there. For reasons I'm sure you'll understand when I tell you about it, we haven't wanted to bring in the regular police."

"We? Who's we?"

"The company I work for. I'm with Daley Electronics, out at the edge of town."

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"Computers?" Mr. Strang's eyebrows shot upward. "I can remember a time when you had trouble passing elementary algebra."

"Math isn't all that important in my job," said Unsinger. "I'm in charge of plant security. Mostly we're required just to keep a close watch on workers and material in sensitive areas. Nothing much in the way of mystery—until this thing came up two days ago. My men and I are completely stumped, and on turning the problem over in my mind I began to see the similarities between it and Poe's story. Then I remembered our talk that time. Look, I know it's late and you want to be getting home, but my future with the company depends on getting this thing solved and—well, I thought the time had come for extraordinary measures."

"And I'm the extraordinary measures, is that it?" Mr. Strang asked. "Sit down, Charlie, and tell me all about it. I don't know how much help I can be, but I'll be glad to listen."

Unsinger sat heavily on a straight-backed chair next to the teacher. "The 'letter,' in this case, is an interoffice memo," he began. "A single piece of paper with a diagram and a few equations on it."

"What makes it so all-fired important?"

"It's part of a process we're working on—miniaturization. If it works out, we'll be able to take a computer that's now as big as a TV set and reduce it to the size of a pack of cigarettes. Every computer company in the world is working on the same thing. Any information one company comes up with is extremely valuable to all the others. It isn't necessary to have the whole process. Any part of it might save the company weeks or even months of experimentation. And getting your product out into the marketplace first can mean millions of dollars."

"I see," said the teacher. "And I have to assume that somehow this paper was stolen. And you're afraid whoever has it will sell it to one of your competitors."

Unsinger nodded. "The memo was in an 'Eyes Only' folder. Two days ago it was passed along to one of our engineers, Warren Kirby. That was okay, because Kirby has clearance to see such material. But then the fool went and got a cup of coffee, leaving the folder out in plain sight."

"And when he returned it was gone, is that it?"

"Well, the folder was there, but the memo inside had been removed."

"Charlie, excuse my ignorance, but wouldn't it be a simple matter

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to ascertain who was near this Kirby's desk while he was away and—"

"Hell, we *know* who took the memo—he was seen by one of my men."

Mr. Strang looked at Unsinger blankly. "I take it I haven't yet heard the whole story," he said.

Unsinger nodded. "It was a guy on the maintenance crew—Philip Holtz. According to my man, he walked by Kirby's desk, paused for about one second, and zingo—he scooped up the memo and jammed it into his pocket."

"Then why wasn't he apprehended immediately?"

Unsinger's face reddened under its tan. "I'm afraid that was my doing, Mr. Strang. The security guard kept an eye on Holtz and called me on the interoffice phone for instructions. It occurred to me that if we let Holtz think he'd gotten away with the memo, we might be able to nab the person he was going to sell it to as well. So I told the guard not to grab Holtz but to keep a close watch on him—and anything he handled was to be carefully examined.

"Well, an hour later it was quitting time. We're sure that when Holtz left the plant he still had the memo. Beatty, the guard, is a good man—he wouldn't make a mistake about a thing like that.

"I had two men tail Holtz home. He lives only about four blocks from the plant, in a rooming house. On the way there, Holtz didn't stop for a beer, or to talk with anybody, and he didn't come close to a trashcan. He didn't drop anything, either. He went straight to the house and directly up to his room. One of my men kept an eye on his closed door, and the other made arrangements with the landlady to rent a guest room across the hall she didn't usually rent out. The point is, Mr. Strang, that when Holtz went into his room he had the memo with him. And we're sure he didn't come out again. A call was put in to me, and I went over there myself to keep an eye on things.

"About ten o'clock that evening, with Holtz sticking to his room, I began to get a little nervous. So I phoned the company president for instructions. He about hit the ceiling. He told me I had no business letting that memo out of the building, regardless of the circumstances. I was to bust in on Holtz immediately, get the memo, and deliver it to the president at home personally.

"When the boss speaks, I listen, Mr. Strang. So my men and I went across the hall and knocked on Holtz's door. When he answered and I explained how things were, he started yelling about how the

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whole thing was a setup just to get him fired. And he insisted on a search—right then, on the spot."

"I take it the search was reasonably thorough," said Mr. Strang with a grin.

"Thorough? I'll say it was. We took Holtz to the room we'd rented and started in on him first. First his clothes. Shoe heels, jacket lining, pants cuffs—the works. Then we searched Holtz himself. Hair, mouth, in between his fingers and toes—you name it, we looked there. He didn't have the memo on him, that's for sure."

"A question, Charlie," said the teacher. "Before you knocked on Holtz's door, did he have any inkling you were in the house?"

Unsinger shook his head. "He wouldn't have had any reason to swallow the memo or flush it down the john, if that's what you're getting at."

"I see. Go on, please."

"Then we left the other man to guard Holtz, and Beatty and I started in on his room. A really crummy place, if you know what I mean—wallpaper torn, big cracks in the ceiling and walls, only two bulbs working in the ceiling light, cigarette burns on the furniture, carpet worn almost through. And Holtz's style of living was just as sloppy. Unmade bed, empty beer cans around, the newspaper spread all over."

"I'm beginning to get the picture," said Mr. Strang. "About how big would you say the room was, Charlie?"

"Maybe fifteen feet square. A little bathroom off it, and a closet. One corner had a refrigerator and a hotplate. A bed, a dresser, three tables, a straight chair, and an easy chair. That's it.

"Anyway, we started with the junk on the floor. I got a can opener and took the tops off all the beer cans to make sure he hadn't stuffed the memo inside one of them and Beatty looked at each page of the newspaper separately. Nothing. When we were done, we carried enough stuff out to fill a garbage can.

"Then we worked on the usual places. His clothes and the inside of the closet, the drawers in the dresser, and the kitchen cabinets. The refrigerator, the medicine chest, inside the toilet tank, and the bathroom and kitchen drains. It occurred to us he might have tossed the memo out the window, but no dice. There were storm windows on, fastened on the outside.

"Anyway, it was late by then and we were getting tired, so I sealed the room, assigned a guard at the door, and sent Holtz to a hotel

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with a man to look after him. Then I went home for whatever sleep I could get under the circumstances.

"The next day—yesterday—Beatty and I were back on the job. When it came to the furniture, we didn't settle for just tapping it, like Poe's policeman. We tore open cushions and the bed pillows and the mattress and looked through the stuffing. Anything made of tube steel, we reamed coathangers through. If there was a joint in the wood, we broke it open and looked inside. After we hauled all that stuff out, there wasn't much but the bare walls."

"Your methods sound rather drastic," observed the teacher. "That memo must be extremely valuable."

"It is," Unsinger assured him. "And besides, the whole of the stuff we took apart in that room couldn't have been worth fifty bucks. Replacing it will be no problem.

"Anyway, by yesterday evening we were down to taking the plates off all the electrical fixtures and looking inside. We probed around any pipes going through the floor. We even tore off all the wallpaper and examined every square foot of it. We didn't call it quits until two in the morning."

There was a wild look in Unsinger's eyes as he stared at the gnomelike teacher. "And we didn't find the memo, Mr. Strang!" he moaned. "It wasn't there. But it's *got* to be!"

For several moments Mr. Strang considered the problem. "Charlie," he said finally, "if you think I can be of any help to you, I'll be happy to try. But I must say, your search sounds as if it covered everything. Have you considered the possibility that the letter really isn't there, that Holtz either hid it somewhere else or he never stole it in the first place?"

Unsinger shook his head positively. "I trained the security men myself," he said. "They see what they say they see, and they report it properly. If one of them says Holtz took the memo, he took it. And if they say he brought it into his room, that's where it is. I'd stake my life on it. In fact," he sighed, "I guess I already have."

"What's that supposed to mean, Charlie?"

"If I don't find that letter Holtz will sue me for everything but my underwear. False arrest, illegal detention, you name it. He may even get to keep his job. And who knows what he'll steal from Daley Electronics next time?"

"A good point." Mr. Strang glanced at his watch. "But it's getting on toward dinner time, and I'm hungry. Suppose we grab a bite somewhere, and afterward we can visit this room of yours?"

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"Sure thing, Mr. Strang. How does The Aldershot Inn grab you?"

"Well—expensive."

"I'm buying. They've got a dessert there that's out of this world. I keep going back for it." Unsinger paused. "The condemned man ate a hearty meal," he concluded wryly.

The food was excellent. Mr. Strang felt a bit foolish wearing the plastic bib, but he attacked the lobster, which seemed large enough to have endangered small boats, with gusto. When they'd finished their main course, Unsinger whispered in the waiter's ear.

Shortly thereafter, the waiter returned, carrying what appeared to be a melon, whole and uncut, on a silver tray. "What's that?" asked the teacher.

"The dessert," replied Unsinger with a grin. "You'll love it."

"I don't know, Charlie. Melon really doesn't—"

"Watch, Mr. Strang." Unsinger gripped the top of the melon in both hands and lifted. The top came away, leaving the scooped-out lower half, which was filled with a mixture of fruit, ices, and thick syrups in all the colors of the rainbow. "Dig in," he ordered. "It's delicious."

"Amazing, Charlie," said the teacher. "You know, when the waiter brought this thing I'd have sworn it was whole. I never suspected it was—it was—"

Unsinger looked across the table in concern. Mr. Strang was staring fixedly at the melon as if it had some hypnotic effect on him. "Hey, are you feeling all right?"

"What?" Mr. Strang shook his head, startled back to reality. "Oh. Yes, I'm fine. Just fine."

"If you're sick or something, maybe I'd better take you home."

"Let's just finish this dessert and get a move on."

"But—"

"Eat, Charlie. Eat."

Some fifteen minutes later, on the way to Holtz's rooming house, Mr. Strang asked Unsinger to stop at an all-night grocery store. Unsinger waited at the wheel while he went in and returned a few minutes later, carrying a brown bag, inside of which seemed to be something about the size of a pint carton of milk. Maybe the old boy has an ulcer, Unsinger thought. All the way to Holtz's rooming house, Mr. Strang kept the bag clutched to his chest.

When the landlady let them in, she asked Unsinger irritably when

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they'd be finished with this searching business. He muttered something noncommittal and led Mr. Strang to the second floor. Outside the first door on the right stood a uniformed guard with DALEY ELECTRONICS/SECURITY stitched across the front pocket of his shirt.

"He's okay," Unsinger told the guard. "He's with me." He reached for the doorknob.

The teacher grasped his wrist lightly. "Wait, Charlie. I'd like to go inside alone. You wait out here."

"But I don't see—"

"Indulge me, Charlie. I had a brainstorm back at the restaurant. If I'm right, you'll know very shortly. If I'm wrong, I'd like to be alone when I fall on my face."

"Okay, Mr. Strang. Let him inside, Jake."

The paper bag in his hand, Mr. Strang entered the room and shut the door softly behind him. Two minutes passed. Three.

And then the door opened and the teacher stuck his head out. "There's no furniture in here," he told Unsinger.

"I told you, we ripped it all apart and carted it away with the rubbish."

"I need a chair."

"Mr. Strang, are you just going to sit in there and—oh, all right. Jake, get him a chair."

Jake brought a straight-backed chair and handed it to Mr. Strang. The door closed again. Another minute passed. The teacher had been alone in the room for nearly five minutes when—

"What was that?" cried Unsinger. "That sound?"

"I dunno," replied Jake. "It sounded like a gun, maybe—with a silencer on it!"

"From inside the room," added Unsinger. He tried the door. The teacher had locked it.

"Mr. Strang!" cried Unsinger in alarm. "Are you all right?"

"Just fine, Charlie," came the teacher's quiet assurance. "I wonder if you'd do me a favor."

"What's that?"

"Would it be possible to get Mr. Holtz here? I'd like to talk to him, face to face."

"Why in blazes do you want—" And then Unsinger shrugged. "No problem. He's being very cooperative. I guess he figures it'll help his case when he hauls me into court. Jake, go to the hotel and bring Holtz back with you."

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Unsinger rattled the doorknob again. "Will you let me in now, Mr. Strang?"

"Not yet, Charlie. The first person I want to see coming through the door is Mr. Holtz himself."

Philip Holtz arrived some ten minutes later, closely watched by Jake. A thin redhead with a large crop of freckles across the bridge of his nose, he greeted Unsinger with calm self-control. "Finished tearing up my room, have you?"

"Where you're going all the furniture's bolted to the floor, Holtz," Unsinger replied.

"I doubt that. When this is all over I'll be able to afford the best money can buy. All through the courtesy of Daley Electronics. You're going to pay well for what you're doing to me, Unsinger."

"Maybe, Holtz. But first there's a man who'd like to talk to you." Unsinger rapped softly on the door.

"Mr. Strang? He's here."

"Then send him in, Charlie, by all means." There was the sound of the bolt being drawn back and the door opened.

Holtz walked into the room. Aside from the light from the hallway, it was inky black. "Come in, Mr. Holtz," Mr. Strang said from the darkness. "You too, Charlie. And close the door behind you."

"It's dark—" Holtz began. "Put on a light."

"I like the darkness, Mr. Holtz," said the teacher. "But tell me, do you still maintain that you had nothing to do with removing the memo in question from Mr. Kirby's desk at the plant?"

"You, too?" snapped Holtz. "Man, by the time this is over I'll be suing half the village of Aldershot. But for the record, no. I didn't take nothing from the plant."

"Charlie, are you there?"

"Yeah."

"Charlie, I have a theory. I believe that lies told in darkness cannot survive the light. What say you, Mr. Holtz? Could you look me straight in the eye and still maintain your innocence?"

"I don't even know where you're *standing,*" growled Holtz.

"Then by all means, let there be light." There was a soft click, and both Holtz and Unsinger squinted against the glare. Holtz looked wildly about the small room, which looked as if it had taken a bomb blast. Paper was torn from the walls, pipes hung loosely from the bathroom sink, and there wasn't a stick of furniture to be seen except

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the straight-backed chair on the far side of the room in which the teacher sat gazing fixedly at the maintenance man.

"Now then, Holtz," Mr. Strang snapped. "Tell me again. Tell me you had nothing to do with stealing the memo. But only if it's the truth."

Holtz continued to jerk his head about as if expecting help to arrive through the window or out of the walls themselves.

"The truth, Holtz," Mr. Strang repeated. "Maybe a court of law will take a voluntary confession into account. But you must give it now."

Holtz lowered his head and stared at the floor.

"Get on with it, Holtz," ordered Mr. Strang.

"It was me that stole the memo out of the folder on Mr. Kirby's desk."

Only then did Mr. Strang reach into a pocket of his jacket and remove a much-folded sheet of paper. "Is this what you're looking for?" he asked blithely, handing it to Unsinger.

It was.

Later that evening, after the recovered memo had been dispatched to the president of Daley Electronics, Mr. Strang and Charles Unsinger lounged in a rear booth at King George's Arms, a self-styled English pub in downtown Aldershot. "I hope none of my students see me here," said the teacher. "Even in these enlightened times, it's not considered seemly for a teacher to be in a place like this." He sipped at a glass of white wine.

Unsinger was working on his second double scotch. "Okay, Mr. Strang," he said. "You've had your fun playing the man of mystery. How come you could find that memo when we couldn't?"

"Because," Mr. Strang replied, "as in Poe's 'Purloined Letter,' your search didn't take into account the manner in which the letter was hidden."

"Now don't go telling me the place he hid it was too obvious," said Unsinger.

"No," the teacher told him. "The place where the letter was hidden was far from obvious."

"We skinned that room down to the bare walls."

Mr. Strang sucked at his unlit pipe. "To say the letter was hidden is to imply a hiding place—a receptacle of some kind—a box or a niche in a wall or almost anything used to contain the letter itself. The question, then, is: why did you overlook such a receptacle?"

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"Okay, why did we?"

"I suppose it's a matter of two qualities. One, I'll call 'wholeness,' for lack of a better term. And the second is 'place.' "

"Come again, Mr. Strang?"

"Take 'wholeness' first. Charlie, there are certain things we expect to have a quality of being whole—that is to say, incapable of being penetrated. If one grants the wholeness of such an object, one would tend to ignore it in a search. Let me give you an example—from Poe himself. Do you remember how Prefect G—— mentioned removing the table tops?"

Unsinger nodded. "He wanted to see if the tops of the table legs had been bored out to make a place to hide the letter."

"Yes, but never once did it occur to G—— that the letter might have been hidden in the table top itself."

"Huh?"

"It wouldn't be hard to get a cabinetmaker to take a table top apart and gouge out a space on one of the inner boards. Once the letter was inserted and the table reassembled and varnished, I dare-say Prefect G—— would never have tumbled to the hiding place. You see, Charlie, though it's usually made up of several thicknesses of wood, a table top is expected to be solid. This is the quality—and the expectation—I call 'wholeness.' "

"Okay, but we smashed all the furniture into kindling."

"The table was only an example. Here's another. Suppose you'd opened the refrigerator in Holtz's room and found an egg. Further, suppose you lifted the egg and found it of the proper weight and density. And you observed that the shell was apparently intact, with no holes, no matter how tiny, punched in it. Would it occur to you to actually break the egg in order to assure yourself it didn't contain the memo?"

"No, I guess it wouldn't. But there weren't any eggs in—"

"Just another example. But the man who developed a method of puncturing an egg and sealing it again in a way that couldn't be detected would have a perfect hiding place for a small object—at least until his secret got out."

"Mr. Strang, this is silly. You can't—"

"Not so silly, as you'll understand in a moment. But I also mentioned the matter of 'place.' By that I mean that an object be situated where it's normally found. Take the egg I just spoke of. If you found the egg in the middle of a living-room carpet, say—out of its proper

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setting—your suspicions might be aroused, no matter what the egg looked or felt like.

"There's a children's game, Charlie, called 'Huckle-Buckle-Beanstalk,' which is sometimes played in our elementary schools on rainy days. Very simply, an object—a thimble, perhaps—is given to one child to hide while the rest have their eyes closed. But the one doing the hiding must place the object in plain sight. At a signal, the others open their eyes and begin their search. The first to locate the object hides it for the next game.

"A novice at the game will hide the thimble in some out-of-the-way corner, perhaps at the base of a cupboard where it can only be seen from certain areas of the room. This type of positioning, however, has occurred to each of the others, and such nooks and crannies are the first to be explored.

"The really skillful players use a superior tactic. In the case of a thimble, it might be laid beside a pincushion on the teacher's desk, or maybe worn on a finger. The searchers accept the premise that a thimble belongs with needles and pins, or on a finger, and so their eyes pass right over it without really seeing it.

"Just one final illustration. Consider a log, three feet long and a foot in diameter. If the thing's found in the bathtub during an official search, it's a very suspicious object. Such a log would be examined, x-rayed, and even chopped apart to see if it might contain the article being looked for. But put the same log inside a large fireplace and the chances are quite good that nobody'd look at it twice. The log in the fireplace has the virtues of both 'wholeness' and 'place.' "

"But what's this got to do with Holtz's room?" Unsinger asked. "It didn't have any eggs or thimbles or three-foot logs."

"Charlie, the answer came to me earlier this evening when I saw that melon. It was in its proper place—at our table in The Aldershot Inn. And it seemed to me to be perfectly solid. Without you there to show me otherwise I'd have gone to my grave swearing it was whole."

Unsinger finished his drink. "Maybe it's the booze, Mr. Strang, but I still don't get it."

"Think, man, think. You burst in on Holtz at ten o'clock in the evening. You searched his room until all hours. And the following day you were there until two in the morning. You needed something to make those searches, Charlie—something that clearly indicated there was one part of the room you hadn't considered."

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"We needed—" Unsinger began eagerly. Then he slumped in his chair. "*What* did we need, Mr. Strang?"

"You needed light! And you told me only two bulbs in the ceiling fixture were operating. Clearly then, one or more were not."

"You mean the memo was inside one of those dud bulbs!"

"Exactly, Charlie. Holtz probably prepared the thing long before he actually stole the paper. He could either part a bulb with a glass cutter, or sometimes the glass comes loose from the metal screw socket all by itself. Having prepared the thing, he came home with the memo, wrapped it around the filament rod that sticks up from the bulb's base, and held it with a rubber band. Then he glued the bulb over it, probably using one of these space-age adhesives that will stick anything together. Since the bulb was frosted, you'd have no way of knowing anything was inside without actually breaking it."

"Breaking it," mused Unsinger. "That was the sound I heard when you were in—"

"Right," said Mr. Strang. "I'd brought my own replacements from the grocery store."

"So when you turned on the lights—"

The teacher nodded eagerly. "Holtz saw that all the bulbs were working. It was a pretty good indication that his hiding place had been discovered. The jig was up, and he knew it. End of story."

Unsinger shook his head. "Who'd ever think of looking inside a light bulb? Especially one that didn't work. There it was, sitting in its socket the whole time."

"The requirements of both wholeness and place were satisfied," said the teacher. "There's really very little reason why you'd even consider looking there. But, Charlie, if I'm to remain *whole* for school tomorrow, I'd better be getting back to my *place* right now."

As they left the pub, one final question occurred to Unsinger. "The chair," he asked. "Why did you insist on my getting you a chair?"

"To stand on in order to reach the bulb" was Mr. Strang's gruff reply. "We short people have our problems, too."

"Q"

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Elmer an' Sophie went ghosting whenever Elmer felt the need for some time alone. Him an' that burrow must a ghosted ever' dead town within fifty miles . . .

IT WEREN'T RIGHT

by JANE BOSWORTH

Before that Beatty fella moved in down the road with his brood a bickerin' younguns, Elmer an' me had us a peaceful life running our rock shop or lazing in the sunshine or scouring the great Mohave for more a her precious stones. Mostly, we found agate or chalcedony. Ever' once in a while Elmer happened across some turquoise.

Elmer was born to be a desert rat. He an' Sophie, the burrow, went ghosting whenever Elmer felt the need for some time alone. Sophie always brayed her protest to the load she was carrying for him; but the truth is, she'd kick the stall down iffen he left without her. Him an' that burrow must a ghosted ever' dead town within fifty miles a here. It was ghosting that gave Elmer the idear 'bout how to teach Beatty some manners.

Beatty'd been causing us hurt ever since I run that boy a his outta the shop for pocketing a piece of agate. I'd a give him that stone iffen he'd a asked—but the boy had a chip on his shoulder ever bit as big as the one his daddy carried. His daddy come down to the shop an' threatened us. Elmer, he just loaded up Old Betsy an' showed him the way off the place.

Then things started happening. Someone shot out the store windows, slashed two tires on the jeep, an' dumped a six-foot rattler down the well. Fouled the water good, that snake did. Cost two hundred dollars to have the well drained an' cleaned. We knowed Beatty done them things. Ain't nobody else got any reason to hurt us. But we couldn't prove nothing an' the sheriff can't do nothing without proof. Just seems like today's laws is written to help criminals an' hurt us law-abiding folks.

Then Beatty started parking his motorcycle in the shade a the

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Coppertone sign just south a here. He'd sit there all day just watching the place. Dang him. He was as mean a looking sidewinder as I ever seen. Got squinty little eyes, cauliflower ears, a ragged beard, and stringy blond hair hanging to his shoulders. We didn't get a single customer once he started squatting out there. Elmer, he went into town to talk to the sheriff. Beatty, he followed him all the way in an' back out again.

I ain't never seen Elmer so mad. He come into the shop, loaded Old Betsy with buckshot, an' marched out to where Beatty was sitting. Told him he'd blow his head off iffen he didn't get moving. Beatty just threw back his head an' laughed. Seems it ain't legal to shoot a trespassing varmit 'less he's trespassing inside your house an' you knowed you locked the house up. And it ain't illegal to park yourself on the shoulder a the highway. The sheriff come out that night an' told Elmer iffen he threatened Beatty with a gun again he'd be thrown in jail. Then off the cuff he told Elmer he thought Beatty was plum loco, thought he should be locked up in one a them hospitals. Said for Elmer to watch his back.

But Elmer had hisself a way to outsmart Beatty. The next morning he put a light pack on Sophie—just some food, water, a sleeping bag, an' a camp shovel—an' the two a them lit out for old Congress. The only thing left in Congress is a few fallen headstones an' the old May mine. Everything else weathered away long ago. Never was no water there. It was trucked in ever' month till the town died in 1938. Beatty, he watched them until they was just two specks on the horizon, then he jumped on his motorcycle an' lit out after them.

Only us oldtimers knows the trail into Congress. Just before you get there you got to cross an' old lava spill. Elmer figured that iffen the rocks didn't pop Beatty's tires, the reflected heat would blow his engine. One way or another, Beatty was gonna be stranded. Elmer figured to leave him out there for a day so's he could think on his sins.

But Sophie come home alone in the wee hours a the morning. She was braying loud enough to wake the devil so I come out to see what was wrong. She nuzzled me in the back and pushed—the way she always does when she wants to show you something. I followed her into Congress to where the old graveyard is. There, 'mongst the brush-covered graves an' falled headstones was a slice a newly turned earth.

Sophie started hoofing at it. She just kept hoofing until she hit something. Then she sniffed it and brayed at me. I brushed the dirt

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away an' looked at Elmer. His eyes was all sanded over an' he had this strange smile on his lips. Something was caked on his forehead.

At first I was angry. What was he doing hiding under all that dirt? "This ain't funny," I said to him. "You get yourself up outta that dirt an' come home with me."

But he didn't move. I sat on my feet watching the sun creep across his face. Then this big old blowfly landed on his lips an' walked up his nose. Elmer hated flies—called them the spawn a Satan. He'd a never let that fly walk on his face, not iffen he could help it. It was that fly made me see my Elmer was gone. I remember telling Sophie Elmer'd sleep forever. Then I covered his face with my handkerchief an' reburied him. Don't know how long that took. I recollect finding an old wooden cross an' putting it on his grave. Then I said the 23rd Psalm an' me an' Sophie started for home.

There was a hurricane blowing in my mind. Elmer an' me, we been married near forty years. Forty years next September to be exact. Now Beatty had took Elmer away from me. It weren't right. I knowed there was no way to prove Beatty done it, an' even if I could some fancy lawyer'd get him declared insane. Judge'd send him to one a them hospitals for a spell an' then some doctor'd turn him loose.

"Ain't no justice no more," I told Sophie. "Not 'less justice is mine. Elmer'd want justice to be mine, Sophie. He wouldn't want me torn up inside like this."

The idear first come to me when I opened Sophie's gate. I mulled it over while I took the pack offa her. By the time she finished her roll in the sand I had ever'thing figured out. I went into the shop an' headed for the phone—but just then the sheriff pulled into the parking lot. Then I remembered it was Tuesday an' ever' Tuesday 'bout noon the sheriff stopped in for a Coke. I opened the bottle, set it on the counter, an' watched him stroll in. As usual the sweat was rolling down his jowels an' his armpits had dark spots under them. He took a couple a swigs before noticing that Elmer weren't around.

"Where's the old man?" he asked.

"Ghosting," I said an' thought how true it was.

He set the bottle down, ran his thumb across the water beading down the side a it, an' stared at me. "Sophie's in the pen," he said.

"Her arthritis was actin' up this morning so Elmer left without her. She's hurtin' too much to do much kicking."

"Em, in the twenty years I've knowed you, I've never heard you lie. Iffen you got troubles, I hope you'll let me help."

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"Ain't nothing wrong, Bill. What could be wrong? No harm's gonna come to an old desert rat like Elmer. He's probably out there sleeping off the pint a Jack Daniels he took along."

Bill knowed I was lying. It was written all over his face. He scratched at his dandruff, finished his Coke, an' left. I watched him drive off, then I picked up the phone an' dialed Beatty. I covered the mouthpiece with an old dustcloth.

One ring. Two. Three—

"Yeah."

"I seen what you done to Elmer Grady," I said.

"What the hell are you—?"

"I want money. Lots a money."

"Who is this?"

"Five thousand dollars. Brung to Elmer's grave."

"I haven't got—"

I hung up. It took Beatty fifteen minutes to get over to the shop. He come busting in. His face was pale as chalk dust an' he was shaking all over.

"Goodness, boy. You look like the sun's got to you. Set yourself down in front a this here fan."

"Listen, Grandma. I ain't about to play no games with you."

"Games? Was you outside in this heat playing games?"

He slammed his fist on the counter and shed a hateful look at me. "Where's the old man?"

"Ghosting."

I seen a look a pure terror come over his face an' I watched him brave hisself against it. He took a deep breath an' searched my face.

"Ghosting? What the hell is that, Grandma?"

"Elmer, he likes to putter around old ghost towns. Took Sophie with him yesterday. She come home without him."

He leaned close enough for me to smell the stink a his breath. "Don't that worry you, Grandma?"

"Gracious, no. Sophie, she always comes home when she figures she worked enough. Elmer be home sometime today."

His eyes drifted to the dustrag beside the phone an' a smile slashed his lips. He walked to the door, opened it, an' looked at me. A look a apology drifted across his face. "Goodbye, Grandma," he said.

"Goodbye, son."

I watched him get on his motorcycle an' raise the dust behind it. Then I dialed his home again an' put that old dustrag over the mouthpiece. His wife answered.

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"Tell Beatty to come as soon as he can."

"Who is this?"

"Never mind 'bout that. Just you tell him."

I hung up, loaded up a day pack, grabbed old Betsy, an' lit out for Congress. I knowed I'd reach it 'fore he did 'cause ain't a city-slicker around can outwalk me. An' I knowed Beatty'd leave his motorcycle outta hearin' range an' that meant he was gonna be walking. Took me a little over two hours to reach Congress. I climbed up the hill an' sat just inside the Old May mine so's I could see him coming. He weren't far behind me.

Me an' the Stevens twins used to play in the May mine. Pa woulda turned over in his grave iffen he'd a knowed the kinda games we played. When the mine closed in 1920, the stewart put a piece a plywood over the main shaft. We used to run, jump the shaft, touch the back wall, and run back out again. Iffen we'd a landed on that board, I reckon it'd give way. That shaft ain't deep enough to kill a grown man, but it mighta killed a child.

I seen Beatty coming in from the south.

"Up here!" I yelled. "I'm up here!" I stood an' waved.

As soon as Beatty turned an' seen me, I stepped into the mine. I knowed that shaft was in front a me but dirt an' rock had covered that board. There was just enough light in the mine for me to see the granite shelf that wedged out from the back wall. I knowed there was a natural cave back a that shelf just big enough to hide in. But where was the shaft?

"Five plus three an' you're safe," Angie Stevens' words come back to me.

Five steps forward an' take three to the left. Then you can walk in safety. I paced it off, trying to keep my steps the size of a child's. My heart was pounding in my throat an' my ears was straining to hear the hollow sound a footsteps on wood. I didn't stop sweating 'til I was behind that wedge a granite. Beatty scrambled up the pilings an' stumbled into the mine. He was waving some kinda pistol in front a him.

"Grandma? Where are ya? I got the money here!"

I cocked Old Betsy, set her nose on the granite, an' sighted down her. Beatty, he heard me cock her an' he aimed the pistol at me. Then he looked at the shoring above his head.

"It's old, Grandma. Too old to take the noise a shots. Put down the gun an' let's talk."

"You first."

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He set the gun at his feet an' stepped over it.

"I got the money, Grandma," he said an' eased forward.

"Don't come no closer."

"You ain't gonna shoot, Grandma. You ain't gonna bring this mountain down on us."

His voice was gentlelike—almost soothing.

"Boy, you got to quit easing in on me."

He stopped. I knowed he was less than a step away from that board. He took a knife outta his pocket, opened it, an' stroked the side a the blade.

"It ain't gonna hurt, Grandma. I'll make it clean an' fast. Then you can join the old man. You want to do that, don't you?"

"Put the knife down, boy."

"I can't, Grandma. I got to protect myself. I got to make sure nobody knows what happened out here."

"Boy, don't you move—"

I heard the hollow thud of his boot on that board. Then I heard the board crack an' he just sorta slid into the shaft. The last thing I seen a him was his fingers grasping the air above his head. I heard him bounce offa the sides an' then I heard a dull thud. He screamed once an' then ever'thing was silent.

I leaned old Betsy against the granite wedge an' kinda tiptoed over to the edge. I couldn't see nothin' down there.

"Boy?"

He didn't answer. I got down on my hands an' knees an' peered into the hole. Funny thing, I remember how the dust kinda swirled in the sunlight an' there was a dank musty stink rising from that pit.

"Boy? You alive?"

I heard moaning.

"Boy?"

"I think my leg's broke. I feel something sticking outta the skin an' it's bleeding. Grandma, you gotta go for help!"

"You was gonna kill me."

"No. No, I wasn't. I just wanted to scare you a little so you'd leave me alone. Please, Grandma, I need help. It's dark down here."

"You killed my Elmer."

"I didn't mean to. Honest I didn't. It was an accident. Please, Grandma, my leg's starting to hurt something awful. You got to get help."

I sat back on my heels an' thought on what he said 'bout killing

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Elmer. I couldn't rightly understand how a body accidentally gets his head bashed in.

"Grandma, I'll die without help. Pleease don't leave me down here! Graaandmaaaaa!"

It weren't no accident that killed Elmer. Just like it weren't no accident that put Beatty in that shaft. I coulda told him it were there but I didn't.

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. I got me an old-fashioned sense a justice, boy. An' you got my kinda justice coming. Iffen you ain't never learned to pray before, you got some time to learn how," I shouted down to him.

"Grandma!" he screamed. *"Don't leave me here!"*

"Goodbye, son."

I figure there weren't no greater justice than being left to die in a pit. I figure I was right to leave. What I didn't figure on was them roustabouts coming into Congress to drill for the natural gas they found in '33. One of them climbed down that old shaft to settle a wager 'bout what kinda varmit would stink like that.

They found Old Betsy just where I left her an' the sheriff brought her home. I didn't mind leading him to Elmer. I'm glad I done that cause Elmer's resting in a bronze coffin an' I got the plot next to him reserved.

I been a guest in this nice hospital going on six months now. Get three nice meals a day an' a room a my own. Ever'day I get to talk to that nice Dr. Nelson. He wears thick glasses an' has a ponytail. Just this morning he told me I was gonna be released. Seems I got ever'thing right in my head now. Course, I learned in a hurry never to say I weren't sorry for leaving the boy. Just like I learned never to say justice was mine—after all.

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a *NEW* Sam Ohara detective story by

NAN HAMILTON

The spectacle caught and held Ohara in a way he would not have believed possible. Acts of villainy, nobility, bravery, and murder unfolded before him. The essence of evil in the Noh, the classical theater of Japan, had little in common with the crimes that made up his daily routine, but he wished some of his villains would so obligingly identify themselves by wearing a black mask . . .

THE MASKS OF NOH

by NAN HAMILTON

There were other things Lieutenant Sam Ohara would rather have been doing that hot summer night in Los Angeles, his first evening off after a prolonged stakeout. He was batching it since Peggy and the children were on holiday in Japan. To make amends, Ojiisan, Peggy's grandfather, had invited him to a performance of Noh, the classical theater of Japan. The old man had been so delighted with his idea that Ohara hadn't had the heart to refuse.

As a result, dressed in his best dark-blue suit, white shirt, and sober tie, he was part of a small procession going down the side aisle of the auditorium to meet the star of the show, Takayama the Fifteenth, before the performance.

On this occasion he was no longer "Irish O'Hara," a designation Sergeant Reagan had created for him when he'd joined the Police Department. To Reagan, an Ohara named Isamu was unthinkable, whether he was Japanese-American or not, so he'd turned Isamu Ohara into Irish O'Hara and the name had stuck.

Mr. Okui, Ojiisan's old friend, was manager of the Noh company and had arranged the invitation to the performance and the reception following. A plump little man, he bounced along beside them,

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explaining in detail how fortunate they were to have Takayama the Fifteenth as their star. "He is a true master, one of the greatest. He has taught and directed every role, every play."

Opening a heavy steel door, he led them backstage through a maze of orderly confusion to a dressing room in the rear. As he raised his hand to knock, a man's voice snapped in Japanese from behind the closed door, "I can do nothing more, so get out!"

A higher, thinner voice replied, "You must find a way. I'll always get what I want, one way or another."

As Mr. Okui hesitated, embarrassed, the door opened and a small elderly man appeared. His wizened brown face, ludicrous above a red-silk kimono, creased into the semblance of a smile. "*Comban wa.*" Even as he said "Good evening," his sly little eyes slid over Ohara's handsome six-foot frame and then over Ojiisan, every inch the patriarch in a formal black kimono.

Mr. Okui recovered his aplomb and made introductions. "This is our great *onnagata,* Futorisan."

Ohara recognized the term for male actors who played women's roles, a tradition in Japanese Noh theater.

A young man approached, carrying tea things on a tray. "*Gomen nasai,*" he murmured politely and began to edge his way around them to enter the dressing room. Futori, suddenly enraged, grabbed his arm and in the rudest language accused the young man of neglecting him. He ordered him to go to his dressing room at once. The target of Futori's tongue-lashing stood humbly staring at the floor. He was as tall as Ohara and well muscled, one of the new-generation Japanese. He said, "Takayamasan has asked me to bring tea for his visitors. After I attend to my master, I will come to you."

Okui cut in. "You are here to serve Futorisan as well as your master." Then he laid a soothing hand on the actor's arm. "Don't upset yourself—I will see to it that he comes at once." Futori grunted angrily and left them. The young man opened Takayama's door and slipped inside.

Mr. Okui, his bland face distressed, apologized. "Futori can be difficult at times; he is easily upset. It's my job to keep him happy. The young man, Ebisu, is Takayama's pupil, but during this tour he has been serving as dresser to both actors." For a second an unpleasant expression showed in Okui's eyes. "Futori resents Takayama and plays the star at every opportunity, though he is merely a competent amateur *onnagata*—just as I am. However, his influence

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with the backers of the show got him principal-actor status. I am the understudy, though this role is my special work."

Suddenly realizing that perhaps he had said too much, Okui raised his hand and knocked on Takayama's door. There was a moment's wait before it was opened. Then Ebisu, his face flushed and his eyes fiercely bright, invited them to enter.

Takayama welcomed them, smiling. He was a slender man, not much taller than Futori, but he gave an impression of great dignity and strength. His face was classic in its modeling, with broad planes, wide-set eyes, and a high forehead. A fringe of white hair was the only sign of his years.

He greeted them in careful English and was agreeably surprised to learn that both his visitors spoke Japanese. When Mr. Okui explained that Ojiisan was a famous Aikido master, Takayama bowed to him in respect. Ohara's police status drew only a polite nod—Takayama was more impressed to hear that Ohara had been Ojiisan's student.

Then he turned to Ebisu. *"Ocha, kudasai."* The young man hurried to serve the tea as the visitors seated themselves on the one piece of furniture in the room—a wide old-fashioned davenport. Takayama sat on cushions before them. When he had finished serving, Ebisu knelt at the side of the room, silently watching. When Takayama told him to go to Futori, he obeyed without sign of emotion.

Then Takayama led them over to a table on which lay several silk-wrapped bundles. Gently he unwrapped each one, displaying the masks he wore in various roles. They were old and magnificently executed, their simple lines portraying the essence of character. One after another, he lifted them lovingly from their silk coverings—a god mask in gold lacquer, an old man's face, the red mask of the brave warrior, the black mask of evil, a hideous demon.

While the experts talked about Noh, Ohara unobtrusively observed the details of the room. Beside the sofa stood a painted Japanese screen, old and lovely. Directly across from it was a full-length dressing mirror and small makeup table. Against the side wall hung a rack of costumes, their brocades rich enough to make a *shogun* envious. Underneath them stood a pair of what appeared to be white tabis, the divided socks usually worn with kimono. These, curiously, were not socks but built-up shoes. Since Takayama was scarcely middle height, Ohara concluded that he used them in roles demanding an imposing stature. On the dressing table lay an elaborate

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headpiece and, beside it, looking oddly out of place, a brown pharmacy bottle and a paper cup.

Mr. Okui began the polite formalities of departure. As they were leaving, Ebisu returned. He was obviously holding himself under tight control. A few minutes later they were in their seats, just before the curtain went up.

The stage had been transformed by a square-roofed platform. Extending from one side of it was a covered walkway leading to an exit fronted by a brilliantly striped satin curtain. The only scenery was a simple painted backdrop of three pine trees. Four musicians were seated at one side and a chorus stood at the rear of the platform.

After a staccato beating of drums and short guttural cries from the musicians, the satin curtain was flung up and a minor actor, unmasked, began the play. The chorus narrated the action and the musicians emphasized the dancelike movements of the performers as they appeared.

The first scene, according to the program, dealt with a god. When the satin curtain flew up to reveal Takayama, richly robed, wearing the golden god-mask and the magnificent antique headpiece, his appearance was breathtaking. As he moved along the walkway in a series of dramatic poses, he looked enormously tall, which was remarkable, Ohara thought, remembering the man he had just met. The built-up tabis were obviously a necessity. Takayama's gestures were fluid and free, their stylized form giving them a timelessness, a reality beyond realism. Every movement was deliberate, suggesting limitless power. His voice was rich and full-throated.

The spectacle caught and held Ohara in a way he would not have believed possible. Acts of villainy, nobility, bravery, and murder unfolded before him. The essence of evil in the Noh had little in common with the crimes that made up his daily routine, but he wished some of his villains would so obligingly identify themselves by wearing a black mask. Here was evil on a grand scale—here retribution was sure beyond the muddied complexities of Ohara's world.

In the second scene Takayama, in red robes and red mask, played a brave warrior. The vigor of his stamping was amazing for a man of his years as he wielded a heavy antique blade with ease.

When the *onnagata* appeared as the warrior's daughter, his movements in the bulky brocade costume were as lithe as a girl of seventeen, his manipulation of the woman's mask portrayed an incredible range of expression. Futori might be an arrogant little

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man but Ohara could see that his claims to star status were justified. He was not just barely competent as Okui had described him. Great artistry showed in the stylized droop of his body, as, by line alone, he expressed the purity of universal sorrow.

The two stars appeared together in the last act. Frantic drum beats heightened the terror of the scene. Takayama, as the avenging demon, filled every moment with chilling menace, but the doomed maiden's pathetic last scene hushed the audience and held them spellbound. Whatever their personal differences, the two performers played magically together.

The after-theater reception was pleasant but anticlimactic. Takayama arrived, pale and exhausted, and breathing with difficulty. Ebisu quietly gave him a capsule which he gulped down with water, his hands clenched into fists. Almost immediately his color began to come back and he turned politely to be introduced to the guests. Takayama did his best, but soon a sheen of sweat grew on his forehead. Mr. Okui grew concerned that something was seriously wrong. He was greatly relieved when Ebisu and his master left.

The following morning Ohara was back at his desk, grateful for a lull to catch up on his paperwork. In mid-morning his phone rang and Desk Sergeant Reagan announced, "Hey, Irish, there's a man here says he want to see you, a Mr. Okooee."

Surprised, Ohara told Reagan to send him up. A few minutes later, his obviously distressed visitor was sitting opposite him. Mr. Okui lingered over the courteous preliminaries until Ohara had to cut them short. "What can I do for you, Okuisan?"

The little man gulped, and after laboriously explaining the need for secrecy blurted out his problem. "Futorisan is missing."

Reluctantly he revealed that Futori had not slept at the hotel or appeared for the special morning rehearsal at the theater.

"When did you see him last?" Ohara asked.

"When he went to his dressing room after the performance last night. I talked to him through the door."

"Through the door?"

Mr. Okui looked embarrassed. "Sometimes when Futorisan was angry he wouldn't see anyone. I told him he could ride with us to the reception but he said he didn't intend to go and that I should leave him alone."

For Ojiisan's sake, Ohara felt an obligation to investigate. He stood up. "All right. Let's go ask some questions . . ."

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When they arrived at the theater there was still no sign of Futori. Takayama and Ebisu were in the star's dressing room where Ebisu was working on a fine red-brocade costume that was stained around the hem. Ohara learned that Takayama had last seen Futori on stage at the end of the play. Ebisu said that when he had gone to help Futori out of his costume he had found the door locked. "He shouted through the door for me to go away and stay away."

Ohara and Okui went to Futori's dressing room. All was in order. Ohara walked over to the rack of costumes. The white brocade Futori had worn in the last scene the night before was hanging with the others. As Ohara slid the hangers to one side, they moved smoothly along the iron rack. A rose kimono was caught in the rear corner of a flat trunk marked FUJIYA COMPANY. He bent to release the fragile brocade, but it was held firmly by the lid of the trunk. The snap lock had been closed.

"Where's the key to this?" he asked.

"Maybe here." Okui went to a laquered makeup chest and searched, but found no key. "I'll have to get mine." He turned to leave.

"No," Ohara said. "I'll smash the lock. It may be too late but we've got to try."

Okui's face blanched as he grasped Ohara's meaning. He rushed out and quickly returned with a stagehand, who broke the lock and lifted the lid. They were much too late. Futori's face, blue and agonized, stared up at them. His hands were clawed around a rose-silk obi cord imbedded in the flesh of his neck.

Ohara set the official process in motion. By the time the Forensics people had finished, he was well into a series of almost fruitless interviews. They all amounted to the same thing: Futori had finished the play and retired to his dressing room and no one had seen him after that. Ebisu and Okui had been seen talking to him through his closed dressing-room door. Only one other bit of information surfaced from one of the stage crew, Shig Noguchi. Shortly before the performance, Futori had instructed him to stand ready in the wings with a scalding-hot herb brew, which he used for his throat. "I make very hot," Noguchi explained, "and I wait in wings with cup held out, but he change mind and not want. He just say to go away, then he go back on stage."

"That's Futori for you," Mr. Okui commented dryly.

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Young Noguchi licked his lips nervously, then blurted out. "One bad thing happen—"

Ohara caught it. "And what was that?"

"When Futorisan go back on stage, I not remember Takayamasan make entrance right away, so by accident I bump into him and spill drink." *Gomen nasai, Takayamasan,* he had said, I very very sorry, and had proved it by several abject bows, but Takayama had waved the apology away though he must have been in pain.

Mr. Okui cleared his throat and interrupted. "Oharasan, what about our performance tonight? I must rehearse Futori's role. To close would be bad for us. We have only tonight and tomorrow."

Ohara took pity on him. "Do whatever is necessary. I see no reason why the performance should not go on."

There was little more Ohara could do at the theater, so he left to get a warrant to search Futori's hotel room.

When he did, he found nothing informative. On a hunch he checked on whether Futori had left anything in the hotel safe. To his surprise, the desk clerk handed over a bulky manila envelope. It held a large amount of American currency and a magnificent star-sapphire ring set in gold. The inside of the ring was engraved in Japanese characters: *Takayama the Fifteenth, 12.3.1932.*

Though it was almost curtain time, Ohara went back to the theater and directly to Takayama's dressing room. The actor was in full costume except for his mask. His built-up tabis, which made him as tall as Ohara, flashed with pristine whiteness against the rich brocade of his robe.

Takayama smiled welcome. "Do you come to see the Noh again, Oharasan?"

"No, I've come on other business." Ohara extended his open palm holding the sapphire ring. "Can you tell me how this came to be in Futori's effects in the hotel safe?"

"Yes," Takayama said, "I gave it to him."

"You gave Futori the ring marking your ascension as Takayama the Fifteenth?"

"What else could I do? I had borrowed money and could not pay. He took the ring as surety." Takayama held out his hand. "Perhaps under the circumstances I might have it back."

For a silent moment the two men stared at each other, their faces as unrevealing as masks. At last Ohara smiled. "It appears to be your property," he said.

Takayama took the ring and placed it on his finger. "Thank you,

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Oharasan. I will not forget your courtesy. Now I must prepare for the performance. The mask, Ebisu."

Ohara watched Ebisu adjust the mask and headpiece on Takayama. The young man looked strained. Even his walk was different, lacking its former spring, as he shuffled about in straw slippers.

Masked, Takayama became majestic, almost godlike. He lifted his hand, on which the sapphire shone in brief farewell, then left to take his place in the wings.

As Ohara was about to leave, he noticed a red-silk robe hanging by itself. The odor of cleaning fluid clung to it, but the hem was still darkened by an ugly blotch. The stagehand had really made a mess of it.

The Forensic report came in the next day—and it was a bombshell. Futori had conveniently provided an alibi for just about everyone by giving a brilliant performance on stage when he was presumably dead.

Ohara checked with the Medical Examiner and was huffily informed that there was no mistake. It would be Ohara's job to explain the lively corpse he had watched perform.

If the coroner's time of death was accurate, then everyone backstage was suspect. Ebisu had left them briefly to help Futori dress, and had returned very uptight and nervous. The crucial time span was from shortly before the performance until well into the first act of the play. Ebisu, Okui, or an unknown would have had the opportunity then to kill Futori. Only the chorus, the musicians, and Takayama were in full view of the audience all of that time.

When Ohara considered motive, there were only two slender threads—Ebisu's lacerated pride turned violent and Okui's stifled resentment of Futori. How much had it galled him to be a general dogsbody and understudy to a man he considered his inferior?

Ohara shifted restlessly in his chair. Matching up motive and opportunity wouldn't catch a murderer this time. Whoever had killed Futori had taken his place on stage and done a bang-up job of it. That narrowed it to an actor—a good one who knew and could perform the demanding *onnagata* role. Ebisu's abilities were an unknown quantity. Perhaps such roles were part of his training.

In some ways Okui was the better candidate because he was Futori's understudy, but Ohara had been with him until the last minute before curtain time. Would he have had time to kill Futori and put

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on makeup and a complicated formal kimono unaided? Was he capable of the kind of performance Ohara had witnessed?

As his mind wrestled with the problem, Ohara's fingers absently doodled on the fresh sheet of white paper he'd laid out for his notes. His mind going around in circles, he stared at the disfigured white paper where his pen had scratched round and round with frustrated energy. Annoyed, he started to crumple the paper, then stopped and looked at the dark splotches marring the white background.

With sudden insight, he went back over Okui's first-night conversation. Then he reviewed in detail his two separate visits to Takayama's dressing room and the actions of the performers on stage. Everything fitted. He knew how it had been done and who had done it.

It was already late but Ohara made it to the theater a half hour before curtain time. Backstage was a buzz of excitement. Actors stood about in small groups talking, but fell silent when they saw him. They were already in costume, wearing antique style black kimonos with grey-crested overjackets. Okui was not in evidence. Ohara decided it was more urgent to talk to Noguchi, the stagehand—much depended on his answers.

Relieved to see him on the far side of the stage, he made his way there, but then he sensed he was being followed. He turned suddenly and caught a glimpse of Ebisu just slipping behind the stage platform. With a sense of unease Ohara wondered who else had guessed Noguchi's importance.

After talking with Noguchi, Ohara lost no time in getting to Takayama's dressing room. He knocked sharply and then, without waiting for an answer, opened the door. Ebisu jumped to his feet, thrusting his hands behind him. Takayama, unlike the other actors, was dressed in a simple grey kimono, his bare feet in straw slippers. For the first time, he looked frail and old. Then he seemed to draw himself together as if to gather strength from the innermost parts of his being. "We have no time for questions just now, Oharasan," he said, "Excuse us, please."

"You *must* make time. Ebisu is a prime suspect in Futori's murder."

"Ebisu?" For a moment Takayama's calm was shattered. Then he regained control. "I told you he was in my sight for the entire evening."

"He was alone with Futori before the performance."

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"Futori was alive when I left him," Ebisu protested.

"What does that matter?" Takayama countered. "Futori was on stage for the entire performance. You have a whole audience as witness."

"Futori was dead before the performance began." Ohara watched the shock hit. "Take off your right sock, Ebisu."

"No." Ebisu moved defensively backward. "Why should I?"

"It's the only real proof that you did not kill Futori."

Ebisu looked at his master for guidance. "Do it," Takayama said. Reluctantly, Ebisu dropped the built-up tabis he had been hiding behind his back and took off his right sock. An ugly burn covered his foot and ankle.

"Noguchi says he spilled Futori's scalding-hot drink on the hem of Takayama's robe and over his foot and ankle. It is your foot, Ebisu, that is burned."

Ohara looked at Takayama's bare right foot, umblemished above the straw slipper, then he went over and picked up the built-up tabis. "Ebisu is tall and had no need to wear these. Otherwise they too would have been stained, as was the hem of his red robe."

Hurriedly Ebisu explained, "You are right. I did take Takayama-masan's role. Sensei told me he wanted to watch me in performance. Was that wrong?"

"No," Ohara replied. "But it was a crime for someone to murder Futori before the performance and take his place on stage so brilliantly that no one—not even you, Ebisu—noticed."

There was a moment of shocked silence, then Ebisu's face lit with relief. "Okui was Futori's understudy. He did it."

"No, Ebisu!" Takayama said sharply. "Okui could not have done it!"

Ohara nodded. "I agree. It took a master. Okui is merely competent. Everyone saw Takayama give his usual great performance, yet for the first time in his mediocre career Futori was his equal."

Takayama stared down at his hands with a weary smile. Only a sixth sense of danger warned Ohara as Ebisu lunged. Atuomatically, he moved into a defensive position, but Takayama's arm shot out like an iron bar to prevent the attack.

"Ebisu," he said, "I love you as my son, but you must not jeopardize everything by more foolishness. It was a good plan and except for you, Oharasan, it would have succeeded." Takayama paused, then continued, his voice strong. "But be clear on one thing. Ebisu knew nothing. After he was in costume, I left him. He thought I went into

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the audience. Instead, I went to Futori. There was plenty of time before his entrance to do what I had to do. My greatest challenge and my greatest shame was trying to fool you, Ebisu, but it was necessary."

Ohara remembered that memorable performance: how Takayama's richly timbred voice had assumed Futori's high pitch, how that square masculine body had shrunk and swayed with feminine litheness, how even Okui and Ebisu, who knew him well, were convinced that Futori had shouted to them through the dressing-room door. "I think, Takayamasan," he said, "it was the greatest performance of your career."

"But why?" Ebisu asked, his voice breaking.

Takayama looked at him. "You are the successor I have trained. You will carry on our line. Nothing must interfere with that. Futori was a threat to you, so I had to remove him."

Ohara was facing not a man, but Noh itself—a simple world that recognized only good or evil, where honor triumphed and punishment was swift and sure.

For a moment Takayama was silent, then he went on. "We have a rule in our line that students may not marry. Ebisu and the daughter of a powerful man fell in love. They kept it secret. But after he had left on this tour, the girl found she was pregnant. She killed herself rather than face her family."

"I never knew," Ebisu moaned.

Expressionlessly Takayama went on. "Futori had seen them together and when the gossip about the girl's death reached him, he came to me. He told me what he knew. The girl's father had vowed to find the man and have him killed. Futori said that if I did not pay he would tell the father that Ebisu was the man. I gave him all I had, even my ring. Then I realized it would never end. When I was wrung dry, he would still ruin Ebisu. So I killed him."

A soft knock sounded at the dressing-room door and Okui's voice announced, "It is time, Takayamasan."

"We are coming," the actor said. He looked at Ohara, then at Ebisu sobbing at his feet. "Get up," Takayama commanded him. "You owe me a debt." Then he pulled Ebisu to his feet and, taking the sapphire ring from his own hand, he put it on Ebisu's finger. He pointed at the door. "It's time for the ceremony—go!"

Slowly, as if the simple act of putting one foot before the other was a superhuman effort, Ebisu moved to the door, opened it, and walked to the stage.

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Takayama stared after him a moment, tired and drained. "Ohara-san," he said, "would you do me a final courtesy? Let me hear it. I will not run away."

"Yes," Ohara said. "We will go together."

They walked to the wings where the stagehands were crowding to witness the ceremony. As the curtains opened, the actors, chorus, and musicians knelt on stage like two converging arrows of grey and black with Ebisu at the apex.

Okui stepped forward and explained to the audience the unique ceremony they were privileged to witness, one never before seen outside of Japan. They would see the proclamation of the new head of a dynasty. Then he turned back to the actors, opened his fan, and lowered it. As one by one the company came up to Ebisu and bowed before him, Ohara heard a long sigh from the silent figure beside him and knew Takayama had left. He kept his eyes on the ceremony, watching Ebisu's masklike face as he received the homage due the great line of actors he now represented.

When the ceremony was almost over, Ohara went back to Takayama's dressing room. The closed door was not locked. Reluctantly, he opened it, then quickly shut it behind him. Takayama was kneeling before the dressing mirror, a crimson robe around his shoulders, the warrior mask lying before him. "I did not run away," he said with difficulty as Ohara came over to him. "Thank you for your kindness—and understanding." His breathing was heavy and rasping. "I have paid in my own way." He opened his fingers and let an empty medicine bottle roll onto the floor.

It was the first time Ohara had ever allowed justice to take its own course. The case would be quietly closed.

As Takayama swayed feebly, Ohara caught him. He lifted the old man in his arms and carried him to the sofa against the wall. They both heard the muffled burst of applause that heralded the new head of the dynasty. Though each breath was a labor now, Takayama smiled.

When Ebisu hurried into the room, Ohara was waiting for him. He had pulled the painted screen in front of the sofa. The red robe was back on its hanger and the medicine container safe in his pocket. "*Sensei*—" Ebisu looked wildly around him, then at Ohara. "You haven't—"

"No," Ohara answered and motioned toward the screen. "He felt

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ill. He's sleeping." Then he pointed to the gold robe of the first scene. "Get ready now—he would expect it of you."

Obediently, Ebisu put on the gold robe. Ohara handed him the god-mask, then the antique headpiece. When he was ready, Ebisu walked over behind the screen and gazed down at Takayama, who lay still, his eyes closed. Ebisu reached out his hand and touched him gently. There was a knock at the door. "On stage, please!"

"You can't take him yet!" Ebisu turned fiercely to Ohara.

"No, not yet. Leave everything to me."

The golden god-mask regarded him silently for a long moment, then Ebisu left the room. The drums began their frantic beating, built to a crescendo, then stopped. Ohara knew without seeing that the satin curtain had been flung up and Takayama the Sixteenth had made his entrance.

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a *NEW* Henry Turnbuckle story by

JACK RITCHIE

"Ralph," Henry said, "one must not jump to conclusions just because of a few shreds of evidence. One must approach the problem with an open mind. One must sift and winnow and deduct to reach the final truth."

Lucinda turned to Ralph. "Are you positive he's a detective-sergeant?" . . .

THE FINAL TRUTH

by JACK RITCHIE

The wallet, conspicuously empty of money, had been found on the floor of the hotel room next to the body.

Ralph and I waited until the fingerprint experts were done with it before we examined its other contents. We found a driver's license, social-security card, various credit cards, and other items indicating that the deceased had been one James L. Spencer and that he had been a Certified Public Accountant residing in San Francisco, which is some two thousand miles from here, as the jet flies.

We also found one local card, upon which was imprinted the name of Amos O'Reilly and information indicating that O'Reilly was an investment counselor having offices in our city.

"Well, Ralph, what do you make of this?"

"Spencer found somebody in his room when he came back from wherever he'd been. He resisted being robbed and got stabbed for his stubbornness."

I began my relentless deduction. "Ralph, you have no doubt noticed that the victim is in his shirtsleeves. His suitcoat is on a hanger in an otherwise empty closet. There is a bottle of bourbon with three

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fingers of its contents missing and a single empty but used glass on the night table."

"So?"

"So if Spencer came back to his room and found an intruder, would that intruder have allowed him to take off his suitcoat, hang it in the closet, make himself a drink or two, and consume them before he stabbed and robbed Spencer?"

"Henry, is there any law saying a man has to take off his suitcoat and hang it in the closet before he pours himself a drink? So he had the drink, took off his suitcoat, and when he opened the closet door to hang it up he found himself eyeball to eyeball with the intruder."

"Why would the intruder hide in the closet while Spencer took his time about having a drink or two? Why didn't he just step right out and get down to business?"

"Because he didn't really want to stab anybody, Henry. He had been going through the room, looking for valuables, when he heard Spencer's key in the lock. So he ducked into the closet, hoping Spencer would go away again, or at least fall asleep or something, so that he could make his getaway."

"Very well, Ralph. Suppose that Spencer *did* open the closet and discover the intruder. Would it follow that Spencer would calmly finish hanging up his suitcoat? You'll notice that the corpse is in the middle of the room at least fifteen feet from the closet."

Ralph does not give up easily. "Maybe he hid under the bed."

I examined Amos O'Reilly's card. "I think it behooves us to find out why Spencer came here from San Francisco in the first place and we will begin with Amos O'Reilly."

We drove to the Browder Building and found Amos O'Reilly's firm on the eleventh floor.

We were directed to O'Reilly's private secretary, who in turn took my card and disappeared into the office behind her. She returned moments later and ushered us into the presence of O'Reilly himself.

O'Reilly was a man in his middle sixties, thin, and plainly worried as he stared at my card. "Detective-Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle, MPD? What can I do for you?"

"Do you know a certain James L. Spencer?"

"Yes," he said cautiously.

I came to the point. "Sir, this James L. Spencer was stabbed to death in his hotel room, probably sometime last night. His body was discovered by a maid this morning."

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O'Reilly seemed to think about that. Deeply.

I smiled grimly. "Now, sir, who is—or was—this James L. Spencer?"

"For one thing, a newly rich man." O'Reilly sighed. "Perhaps I ought to start at the beginning. And that would be with Uriah Hollister.

"Uriah Hollister was my friend for over forty years. Perhaps, in a sense, I was the *only* friend he had, especially during the last years of his life. He was something of a recluse, living in a rather isolated large house in the country. At one time he staffed it with the number of servants required for a structure of that size, but as he withdrew more and more from the world he dismissed them until the only other person in the house besides himself was Franklin. Franklin must be pushing his seventies now. He was Hollister's man of all parts, including that of cook.

"I doubt if Hollister ever so much as left the house in the last fifteen years of his life. And as far as I know, he had no visitors except for me. I usually drove up there on the average of once a month, mostly for business purpose. I am an investment counselor and also the executor of his estate, which was worth some two million dollars when he died. That was four days ago."

O'Reilly paused for a moment. "Approximately five years ago Hollister decided to leave his estate to blood relatives, however remote, rather than to charities, as he had until then intended to do, and he commissioned me to find some.

"Complying with his wishes, I retained the services of a detective agency—Albermarle Investigations, Inc. Albermarle went to work and eventually dug up two people who qualified. One of them was James L. Spencer, of San Francisco."

I asked the expected question. "And the other?"

"Lucinda Pelletier, of Sheboygan. Miss Pelletier is at present staying in Uriah Hollister's house. She preferred it to a hotel, though Spencer did not."

I recapitulated. "And so five years ago these two people were informed they were Hollister's heirs?"

"No. They knew nothing whatsoever about their status until I informed them after Hollister's death. He merely wanted to know that they existed and could be reached when the time came. He didn't want them descending on him and disturbing his privacy while he was still alive."

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I had a question. "You say you were Hollister's best, and perhaps only, friend? Then why is it that he did not mention you in his will?"

"Actually, he intended to leave me two hundred thousand dollars. However, I pointed out to him that since I was his attorney, his financial adviser, and also his executor, leaving me a sum of money that size might arouse suspicions of undue influence, which could delay the execution of the will, possibly for a long, long time, while an investigation was made."

I still had my doubts. "Sir, are you telling me that you turned down a bequest of two hundred thousand dollars?"

He nodded. "While I don't belittle two hundred thousand dollars, I don't actually *need* it. Let us say that I am by no means a poor man. I appreciated Hollister's gesture, but I thought it wiser not to be included in his will."

I moved on. "Spencer and Lucinda Pelletier divide Hollister's estate even-steven?"

"There was just one other bequest. Franklin gets one hundred thousand dollars."

I considered a point. "Is there perhaps some codicil in the will whereby, in the event of the death of one of the heirs, his or her half of the estate would go to the other?"

"There is. However, that paragraph would have been applicable only while Hollister was still alive. The moment he died each heir automatically became entitled to his share of the estate even though I have not yet performed the technicality of formally reading them the will. Spencer's share of the estate now goes to his heir, or heirs, if he has any."

"Ah," I said, "But did this Miss Lucinda Pelletier *know* this? Or was she under the impression that Spencer's half of the estate would go to *her* should something happen to him *before* the formal reading of the will?"

"I rather doubt that."

I asked O'Reilly how to get to the late Hollister's estate, but he did better than that, offering to go along with us and show us the way. Before we left, I borrowed the use of his phone to inform headquarters where Ralph and I could be reached in the event we were needed.

The trip to Hollister's place proved to be a twenty-five mile drive into a countryside of prosperous dairy farms. We eventually turned

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into a long weedy driveway and parked in front of a large structure set amid a rather nice grove of trees.

Off to one side, in the shade of an elm, I saw a gray-haired man reclining in a lawn chair. He raised his glass in salutation, but did not rise.

"That's Franklin," O'Reilly said. "I'd say he's been celebrating."

O'Reilly and Ralph entered the house, but I thought I would linger behind and ask Franklin a few canny questions. I approached him through the tall grass and introduced myself.

He stared at me. "Can't say that I expected you. But you're here. How did you find out?"

Find out? Find out what? But I smiled knowingly. "We policemen have our ways."

Franklin looked at his empty glass and rose. "I must have made a mistake somewhere down the line. Let's go inside."

We entered the house from the rear and stepped into a large kitchen.

"Would you care for anything to drink?" he asked.

"No, thank you."

He pulled the cork from a bottle of brandy and poured generously into his glass. We sat down at one of the kitchen tables.

He studied me. "They say that confession is good for the soul."

I nodded earnestly. "Truer words were never spoken."

"Where shall I start?"

"Anywhere you like."

He thought about that. "Well, he retired at ten every night. And once he was settled in bed I would bring him his glass of warm milk. He was rather old-fashioned in that respect."

I had the feeling that we were not on the same wave-length. "Go on."

"That evening, before I brought him the milk, I laced it with two dozen of my sleeping tablets. He drank it without question and fell into the eternal sleep. It was an absolutely painless death, I assure you."

I was still not quite zeroed in. "And the motive for this killing?"

"Why, the hundred thousand dollars, of course. He left me that amount in his will, you know."

I now grasped the situation. "Hollister threatened to cut you out of his will for some reason or another? And so you had to kill him before he could get the will changed?"

"No, sir. It wasn't that."

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"Very well, then you just couldn't wait for him to die a natural death?"

"In a manner of speaking, sir, no. Though I *did* give him an alternative."

"Alternative?"

"Yes, sir. You see, I had worked for Mr. Hollister for some forty-three years."

I nodded. "The faithful retainer."

"I wouldn't put it that way, sir. A job is a job. Actually, the pay wasn't all that good, but I have always liked security."

Franklin fortified himself with another sip of brandy. "Well, sir, here I was, past sixty-five and time to retire. But what would my future be? I had saved money, but I had invested it through Mr. O'Reilly and somehow it had disappeared. I had almost nothing to look forward to except my social-security benefits.

"However, I knew I was mentioned in Hollister's will to the tune of one hundred thousand dollars. So I went to him and asked him why he couldn't simply give me that money *now* when I could use it rather than waiting for God knew how many more years before he died. He turned me down cold. I think he just didn't want me to retire. He dreaded the thought of having to hire and get used to someone else. My only recourse was to give him the spiked milk."

I was amazed. Here I had come to this house on an entirely different matter and Franklin's confession had fallen into my lap.

Perhaps I was *too* amazed and it showed on my face. Franklin paused on the way to another sip of brandy. Then he seemed to comprehend. "You mean you didn't come here about Hollister's death? You have no proof that I poisoned him?"

I could not tell a lie. "Actually, I came here as part of the investigation into the death of James L. Spencer. He was stabbed to extinction in his hotel room."

I took the celluloid card out of my breast coat pocket. "I am going to read you your rights."

Franklin had pulled himself together. "Why?"

"You have just confessed to murder."

He agreed. "Ah, yes. But only you and I know that. And so it is your word against mine that the event ever occurred. And in this great democracy of ours it is not my job to prove that I am innocent, but yours to prove I am guilty. And now I suspect you won't be able to do that."

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I put the card back into my pocket. "There will, of course, be an autopsy on Hollister's remains."

"He was cremated, sir."

I pursued. "We have quite competent chemists in the department who will sift his ashes and they are bound to come up with enough evidence to send you to prison."

Franklin smiled. "The ashes were scattered over Lake Michigan."

Why did things like this always happen to me? I brooded. "Do you happen to have any sherry in the house?"

He nodded and produced a bottle from a cabinet. I watched carefully as he poured me a glass and was in the process of consuming it when Ralph entered the kitchen. He stared at the sherry. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I said firmly. "Absolutely nothing."

Ralph explained to Franklin. "Henry never drinks sherry, or anything else, unless he's been stymied on a case."

I finished the glass quickly and rose. "Let us question this Lucinda Pelletier person."

We joined O'Reilly in the drawing room just as Lucinda Pelletier entered the house via the back terrace.

She was a small woman with black hair and violet eyes, probably in her middle twenties. She waxed enthusiastic. "I've been exploring the grounds. This place cries for people. Hordes of children. An extended family. Uncles, aunts, grandpas, grandmas. Maybe even a husband. There's a huge space out there that's perfect for a garden and I know just where I'll put the compost pile. Are you into gardening?"

I beamed. "Not at the moment. But when I was a lad I achieved a certain amount of neighborhood fame for my kohlrabi and brussels sprouts." Then I remembered why I was here. I introduced myself, conveyed the news of Spencer's death, and tossed out a routine question. "Miss Pelletier, you are from Sheboygan?"

"Yes. I'm a primary-school teacher. I still live at home with my father and my mother."

I nodded and then caught myself. "Your father and your mother?"

"Yes."

I realized that no one else had caught the obvious incongruity. "If your father and your mother are both *alive*, then why wasn't one of them mentioned in Hollister's will? After all, he or she is one generation closer to Uriah Hollister than you are."

She had an explanation handy. "Actually, my real and true par-

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ents were killed in an automobile accident when I was less than a year old. The Pelletiers were neighbors and they adopted me."

I regarded her critically. "It has suddenly occurred to me that just as a person will kill to *acquire* money, it is also possible that a person will kill in order to *keep* the money he, or in some cases, *she* has acquired."

She cocked her head slightly. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Franklin appeared in the doorway, swaying slightly. "There is a phone call from police headquarters."

Ralph left to take the call and I turned to O'Reilly. "You say that Albermarle Investigations handled the search for Uriah Hollister's relatives?"

"Yes."

"And what do we know about this mysterious Albermarle Investigations?"

"The firm's been in business for over seventy years. It has an A-1 reputation."

"Ah, yes," I said judiciously. "The *firm* has an A-1 reputation. But can we say the same for each and every individual it employs?" I chuckled knowingly. "Let us speculate for a moment. Suppose that one of these agents, these operatives, finding no legitimate heir, decides that he will nevertheless present one anyway. And he and this provided heir will split, or otherwise share, the take once that heir has received her portion of the estate.

"And I further put it to you that James L. Spencer, somehow discovering this deception, threatened to go to the police. The only way he could be silenced was to kill him."

"Ha," Lucinda said in rebuttal. "I have a genuine birth certificate attesting that I am unquestionably a Hollister."

I chuckled again. "Rest assured that I shall leave no birth certificate unturned to get at the truth."

Ralph came back into the room. "Henry, they think they've got the man who killed Spencer. A bellboy named Jimmy Davis."

I blinked.

Ralph continued. "Schmidt and Murphy were questioning the hotel employees and they got around to Jimmy. Schmidt recognized him as being on parole. He also remembered why Davis had been sent up in the first place—for breaking and entering. Mostly hotel rooms. So Schmidt and Murphy searched Davis's room. He has one in the basement of the hotel. They found eight new one-hundred-

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dollar bills in an envelope under his mattress. They figure it was loot from Spencer's wallet."

Franklin had been listening too. He now extended a sympathetic smile. "Shall I get you another sherry, sir?"

I regrouped. "Has this bellboy *confessed* to the crime?"

"Not yet. He asked for a lawyer."

"Ah ha!" I said decisively. "Did he explain how he happened to be in the possession of the eight hundred dollars?"

"He claims he never saw the money before in his life. He thinks that somebody who knew about his record planted it there so he would be blamed for the murder."

"Ralph," I said, "that is a distinct possibility bearing investigation. One must not jump to conclusions just because of a few shreds of evidence. One must approach the problem with an open mind. One must sift and winnow and deduct to reach the final truth."

Lucinda turned to Ralph. "Are you positive he's a detective-sergeant?"

Ralph nodded. "Nobody can understand it. Not even the people who promoted him."

Ralph was joshing, of course.

Lucinda became thoughtful. "Now that I remember it, Spencer didn't seem happy like a man should be when he learns he's inherited a million dollars. And he told me privately that his dead father had often mentioned that there was an uncle in the family who was worth at least *ten* million dollars."

Now she turned on Amos O'Reilly. "How large an estate did Uriah Hollister leave?"

O'Reilly cleared his throat. "About two million dollars."

She smiled sweetly. "But how large was that estate, let us say, five years ago?"

O'Reilly paled.

"Well, well," Lucinda announced triumphantly. "We have hit upon the quick, have we not? And we shall leave no audit unturned until we get at the final truth. We shall sift and winnow and deduct without mercy."

O'Reilly sank into a chair and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. "You will?"

"Now see here, Lucinda," I pointed out. "*I* am in charge of this—"

She directed a "Hush" in my direction and we waited.

Finally O'Reilly sighed. "If only he hadn't been a Certified Public Accountant. I mean how's that for bad luck? All kinds of heirs in

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the world and I have to draw a C.P.A. who's suspicious. You'd think that anybody who inherited a million dollars would just be grateful and leave it at that. But not Spencer. *He* wanted to investigate."

O'Reilly used the handkerchief again. "Uriah Hollister wasn't at all interested in his money. He left *everything* in my hands and he trusted me implicitly. Ten million dollars. That's how much he had at one time."

I took control. "You mean to say that you embezzled or otherwise stole approximately eight million dollars?"

He seemed deeply shocked. "Embezzled? Stole? Good heavens, no. Perhaps I should have left Uriah's assets as they were but, after all, I *am* an investment counselor and it was practically my duty to do everything I could to increase his holdings. I just can't understand it, but every investment I made for Uriah seemed to go sour. And over the course of the years some eight million dollars just dribbled away." He frowned. "And for some reason, I had the same trouble with Franklin."

He shook his head sadly. "I begged Hollister time and time again to get someone else to handle his finances, but he just didn't care. He wanted only enough money to keep him going in this house and he regarded any other money as surplus not worth crying about."

I narrowed my eyes. "And so to conceal your ineptitude from the world and thwart Spencer's investigation, you went to his hotel room and stabbed him to death."

Again he exhibited shock. "Kill Spencer? But *I didn't* kill Spencer."

My temper was definitely frayed. "Then damn it, man, why the devil did you have the temerity to turn pale when Lucinda pointed a finger at you?"

"Well, wouldn't *you* turn pale if *your* reputation as an investment counselor was about to be ruined? Sir, I am as honest as the day is long and I can account for every penny gone. However, if knowledge of what happened to Hollister's estate gets out I could lose half of my clients, if not all."

Somewhere in the house I heard the faint ring of a telephone. I knew, I just *knew* it wasn't going to bring good news.

Ralph took the call and returned.

"Well, Henry, they found a few dried-blood spots on the elbow of the bellboy's uniform. Also a pocket knife. So Davis decided to confess. He says he was going through Spencer's luggage when he heard Spencer at the door, so quick, he hid under the bed."

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I closed my eyes.

"He was going to stay there until Spencer fell asleep or left the room, whichever came first, but after a while Spencer discovered him and pulled him out. He was working Davis over when Davis pulled out his pocket knife and used it. He claims self-defense and he's got some bruises to back up his story."

I went to the French windows and stared out at the grounds. "Ralph, I've struck out three times today."

"Only twice, Henry."

He didn't know about Franklin's confession and he was never going to.

"Henry," Ralph said. "Don't tell me you're getting disillusioned with police work?"

"Ralph, I am *never* disillusioned. In order to become disillusioned one must first have illusions. If one has illusions one sees what is not there. And if one sees what is not there one is in trouble from the very beginning. No, Ralph, I am not disillusioned. Downhearted, depressed, and despondent perhaps, but *not* disillusioned."

I heard Franklin clear his throat and I turned. He carried a tray upon which stood a bottle of sherry and a large water glass.

I still had my pride. "No," I said firmly. "No."

Nevertheless, when I got to my apartment that evening I brought down the bottle of sherry from the kitchen cupboard and poured myself a stiff three fingers.

The next morning, my day off, I was reading my *Organic Gardening* when the phone rang.

It was Lucinda. "Do you know how to work these soil-testing kits?" she asked.

I recognized a trap when I heard one. I told her I'd be right over.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

WHODUNIT: H. R. F. Keating has edited a fascinating new guide to crime, suspense, and spy fiction titled simply *Whodunit?* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, $18.95). Starting off with twenty-one essays on crime fiction and the writing of it by authors like Michael Gilbert, Stanley Ellin, P. D. James, and Eric Ambler, the book goes on to offer a 140-page "reader's guide" to more than 500 authors and 1,500 recommended books. Keating himself concludes the volume with an illustrated section describing the ninety most popular series characters in crime fiction.

The well designed book is not without its flaws, beginning with the omission of an essay by Julian Symons from the book's contents page. The essays contain occasional errors by writers who should know better (p. 39: "*Red Harvest* is the only Continental Op novel"), and many ratings in the "reader's guide" section seem overly generous. Still, the book is a "must" for the true mystery fan, and a valuable reference volume for students of the genre.

RADIO PLAYS: Publishers are traditionally reluctant to issue collections of plays or radio scripts, and yet some very fine mystery writing lies buried in the half forgotten radio dramas of the 1940s and early 1950s. John Dickson Carr was a master of this form, producing close to one hundred radio scripts for the British Broadcasting Company and CBS between 1950 and 1955. Several were published in early issues of *EQMM,* and six were included in Douglas G. Greene's 1980 collection of Carr's stories and plays, *The Door to Doom.*

Now Greene has collected more of Carr's radio mysteries, including several never broadcast in America, in *The Dead Sleep Lightly,* to be published by Doubleday in May. Among the book's many treasures are two "unknown" scripts about Dr. Gideon Fell—"The Dead Sleep Lightly" and "The Black Minute." (Ed. Note: "The Black Minute" will appear in the May issue of *EQMM,* on newsstands in March.)

SINISTER SUNDAYS: Mystery fans in the New York City area should know about Bogie's

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Restaurant, located at 249 West 26th Street. In addition to fine food, the restaurant's "Sinister Sundays" feature old radio mystery shows played each Sunday evening from 9 to 11. On the last Sunday of the month, original radio mystery shows are presented by the Friends of Bogie's, together with a talk and autographing session by a well known mystery writer. The following authors are scheduled: Isaac Asimov (January 30), Richard Meyers, author of *TV Detectives* (February 27), Edgar-winner William L. DeAndrea (March 27), Michael Kurland, author of *The Infernal Device* (April 24), and my fellow columnist Chris Steinbrunner (May 22).

SEQUEL: If you think Robert Bloch waited a long time to write *Psycho II,* his recently published sequel to 1959's *Psycho,* consider the case of Geoffrey Household. His most famous novel, *Rogue Male,* was published in 1939 and now, forty-four years later, he has written a sequel. *Rogue Justice* continues the adventures of his gentleman protagonist in a chase that leads across Europe and the Middle East to Africa. It'll be published in February by Little Brown.

PWA AWARDS: One of the highlights of last October's Bouchercon in San Francisco was the presentation of its first annual awards by the recently formed Private Eye Writers of America. The award for the best hardcover private-eye novel of 1981 was presented to Bill Pronzini for *Hoodwink* (St. Martin's Press), while the award for the best original paperback went to Max Byrd for *California Thriller* (Bantam Books).

COMING ATTRACTIONS: American mystery writer Josh Pachter, now a resident of the Netherlands, has edited *Cream de la Crime,* a major anthology in which some forty of the world's leading mystery writers choose and introduce what they consider their best story. A Dutch edition of the book will be published in March by Loeb, uitgevers bv, and it's hoped that American and British editions will follow.

Due from Countryman Press this spring is *aka Chip Harrison* by Lawrence Block. It's a trade paperback in the Foul Play Press series, containing two novels—*Make Out with Murder* (1974) and *The Topless Tulip Caper* (1975)—originally published under the Harrison pseudonym. The new edition has an Introduction by John McAleer and an Afterword by Block.

Coming from Frederick Ungar are two new titles in its Recognitions series. *Roots of Detection* is an anthology of stories and excerpts from literature giving examples of deduction before Sherlock Holmes. It's edited by Bruce Cassiday and will be published this spring. Later in the year there'll be *Rex Stout,* a critical study of his work by David Anderson.

Ed McBain's *Beauty and the Beast,* the third novel about Florida lawyer Matthew Hope, has been published in England by Hamish Hamilton. An American edition is due here soon.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Currently the television program most dedicated to our genre, the Public Broadcasting presentations of *Mystery!*, have returned to the airways for yet a third season. As before, the shows are welcome, representing a colorful mix of British mystery television which we would ordinarily never get to see. (Some of the programming is actually several years old, for there are a wealth of good English TV thrillers from which to select.) And again, Vincent Price is a witty yet properly sardonic host, never letting his arch humor get too far into the way of the serious villainy of the stories. "The scream is parent to the giggle," he says with some irreverence, but his approach to his narrator's role adds just a splash of fun to a very potent brew.

The first offering of the new season is a production, actually done some years ago, of that grand old melodrama, *Sweeney Todd.* The demon barber of Fleet Street, who has his origins in British oral folk tales dating back centuries, has had many plays written about his bloody deeds. This is neither the Stephen Sondheim musical version, nor the delicious 1930s film version through which bravura actor Tod Slaughter roams the London docks searching out "lovely young throats." But the celebrated Freddie Jones, one of the best performers in the English theater, brings classical grandeur to the part and is second to no one in providing the histrionics the role demands. Alas, in this version, the culinary aspects of Sweeney's operation (his customers disappear after he shaves them, and meat pies are always the special at the bakery next door) is de-emphasized, and the story has a framing device which leaves it rather lukewarm.

The second show is altogether more serious. *Dying Day* is a two-part drama somewhat in the Hitchcock tradition: the everyday events of life take on terrifying meanings. Ian McKellen plays an ordinary clerk taking his customary suburban train home one evening when an eccentric fellow passenger intrudes on his thoughts: would he like to hear the "natural sounds" the man has just recorded at random on his cassette machine? McKellen is annoyed, and even more so when the man accidentally leaves the tape behind at the station. When he gets home McKellen plays the tape—and to his horror hears two unknown voices in conversation, plotting to kill him. Our hero is forced to seek out his would-be murderers, baffled by what the motive might possibly be, in a drama with a touch of vintage Graham Greene.

The *Mystery!* lineup also includes traditional detectives, among

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them new Sergeant Cribb adventures (later in the season) and four G. K. Chesterton stories about Father Brown. Ellery Queen once ranked Brown as one of the three greatest detectives in literature —along with Holmes and Dupin—but the crime-solving priest has not been served particularly well on the screen, having been portrayed in an American film by Walter Connolly and in England by Alec Guinness, both features long and ponderous.

Here, however, the plays are under an hour, more suited to Chesterton's brief puzzles—in a British television series produced in 1973 starring the late Kenneth More. The dramas are all set in the 1920s period, featuring some of Chesterton's best stories—"The Eye of Apollo," about a bizarre cult of sun worshippers, and "The Secret Garden," in which a decapitated body lies. As always, the quiet priest seeks out solutions to crime by exploring the murky depths of the human soul.

This season of *Mystery!* will also deal with blackmail at a country estate (the Francis Durbridge thriller, *Melissa*) and murder at a convent (Lady Antonia Fraser's *Quiet As a Nun*). No less than five Agatha Christie stories will be dramatized, and there is hope for Rumpole of the Bailey to defend some new clients as well. As a showcase of the best in British mystery television, this Mobil-sponsored public-television series has lost none of its gloss as it brings us one more year of treats.

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"Q"

INTERVIEW: LILLIAN DE LA TORRE (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: In his introduction to your first Dr. Sam: Johnson story, Ellery Queen wrote: "Your editor does not pretend to be an expert on Dr. Samuel Johnson and his times. But of one thing he is certain: Miss de la Torre recreates that grand old gentleman-and-scholar in all his glory . . ." And Anthony Boucher later called a collection of your as-told-by-James Boswell stories "probably the most attractive book of shorts ever published." Most of what you write has a historical base and you have referred to yourself as a "histo-detector." What's that?

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DE LA TORRE: "Histo-detector" is my word for a solver of old-time, real-life crimes and mysteries. History is full of long-unsolved puzzles. I believe that if enough records survive they can be solved, and it is fun to try. After 300 years John Dickson Carr solved *The Murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey,* the greatest feat of histo-detection yet. Thus in his footsteps I have, I think, solved the disappearance of Elizabeth Canning in 1752, the identity of the Douglas Claimant in 1768, and the fate of Belle Gunness, the hog-lot murderess, in 1908.

If records are lacking, I can always "histo-detect" in my imagination by making up likely solutions and writing short stories in which "Dr. Sam: Johnson, detector" discovers them—as in my first, "The Great Seal of England," my most recent, "Murder Lock'd In," and most of the twenty-eight in between.

EQMN: Do you think you would—or could—write these stories about the Sage of Fleet Street if James Boswell hadn't written his journals?

DE LA TORRE: Of course I couldn't. That's the advantage of my scheme. My protagonists were real people, and were depicted in the round by a genius—one of them.

So alive are they that I have only to put them into a new situation and watch them as they act their parts in character on the stage of my imagination. As Stevenson remarked of *Weir of Mermiston,* they do my plotting for me.

EQMN: Do you keep a journal?

DE LA TORRE: No, except when traveling. It's odd that I don't, for I share Boswell's feeling that no experience is complete until it has been put into words.

EQMN: Have you always been interested in history? And mystery?

DE LA TORRE: Yes, and yes. By the age of nine, I had the run of my father's bookshelves. There I found—besides Du Chaillu's *Viking Age* and Green's *History of the English People*—a collection of early detective stories which, I now know, would be priceless today. (My mother, who never approved of them, gave them away when she was packing up to move.) I thus absorbed, without entirely understanding them, Conan Doyle, Gaboriau, Fergus Hume, early Austin Freeman, and many others. It marked me for life.

EQMN: What was your major in college, and what did you study at Columbia, Harvard, and the Universities of Munich and Colorado?

DE LA TORRE: My major was always English, and that's what I taught at James Monroe High School in New York when it was spanking new and numbered only 3,000 students. Remember the movie *Up the Down Staircase?* That was filmed at James Monroe, though in shabbier days, and I might have written the script from my own experiences there.

EQMN: In 1980 you received Colorado Springs' Medal of Distinction in the Fine Arts. What brought you to Colorado from New York?

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DE LA TORRE: In 1934 I followed my husband, a graduate of the University of Colorado, to the sunny climate he had learned to prefer. I've never regretted it. I wouldn't have missed the thirty-two years I spent in the East enjoying New York's artistic activities, but in Colorado Springs from the first I have been *part* of such activities—as my medal testifies.

EQMN: Then you don't miss New York.

DE LA TORRE: I love New York, but I could never return to the hassle of living there. That's for heroes.

EQMN: Did you grow up in a large family?

DE LA TORRE: I was the oldest of seven children, now scattered from East to West. The younger ones are like my own children to me. My favorite brother, Theodore de la Torre-Bueno, painter, actor *manqué,* sensitive watercolorist, and writer, is now engaged in a biography of Don Juan de la Torre, "The Conquistador," the family founder in the New World. (Ed. Note: Theodore de la Torre-Bueno's first published fiction, the 600th story in *EQMM*'s Department of Firsts, begins on page 90.)

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

What could be a more fitting memorial to the late Frederic Dannay, Editor-in-Chief of this magazine from 1941 until his death in September 1982, than the latest edition of *Ellery Queen's Anthology* (Fall-Winter 1982; Davis, $2.95), available in hardcover as *Ellery Queen's Book of First Appearances* (Dial Press, $12.95)? The volume gathers 27 of the six hundred first stories that have appeared so far in *EQMM*. Among the notable debuts represented are those of Stanley Ellin, Harry Kemelman, Lillian de la Torre, James Yaffe, Jack Finney, and Thomas Flanagan—and that's just the first decade's crop. The Double Foreword, by Ellery Queen and Eleanor Sullivan, represents a symbolic passing of the editorial flame. This volume is one exhibit in evidence of my conviction that Fred Dannay (as author, editor, collector, scholar) made a greater contribution to the detective story in the Twentieth Century than any other person.

***** Stephen King: *Different Seasons,* Viking, $16.95. The first notable thing about this superb collection is the author's generosity. With the possible exception of the last tale, "The Breathing Method," any of these four novellas could easily be expanded into books (and best sellers) of their own. "Apt Pupil," about a teenage boy's fascination with an escaped Nazi war criminal he has discovered living in his neighborhood, is the longest of the stories (at 192 pages) and

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seems a particularly logical candidate for separate publication. As a whole the collection demonstrates 1. King's versatility, 2. his ability to depict characters of various backgrounds and ages believably, 3. his ability to entertain for long stretches without a whiff of horror (though none of these stories is totally without that commodity), and 4. his ties to the mystery genre, especially in the first two novellas, each of which has a strong, if subtle, detective element.

**** Ruth Rendell: *Master of the Moor,* Pantheon, $11.95. Stephen Whalby, a young part-time journalist and unenthusiastic partner in his father's furniture business, lives for his opportunities to walk his beloved moor. This exceptional novel of psychological suspense begins with his discovery there of a young woman's body. Rendell's constructional virtuosity allows her to do a whodunit and a study of criminal mentality at the same time. Though Chief Inspector Wexford is absent, this is even something of a fair-play detective story, with ample clues for the detective-reader to anticipate (or not) the surprise ending.

**** Reginald Hill: *A Very Good Hater,* Foul Play Press/The Countryman Press, $12.95. Before he finally began being published in the United States with *Ruling Passion* (1977), Reginald Hill wrote several excellent novels published only in Britain. This "tale of revenge," dating from 1974, is one of the best. The story concerns a hated SS officer believed spotted at an English regimental reunion in 1963 and the plotting that follows by two of his victims. Like Rendell, Hill seems to me even better when he is not writing about his series characters.

*** Robert Bloch: *Psycho II,* Warner, $3.50. This sequel, *not* a novelization of the forthcoming film of the same title, displays all the attributes that typify Bloch's work: macabre humor (having Norman Bates play *Charlie's Aunt* in a mental hospital production is an especially nice touch), wordplay, social criticism, a well observed filmmaking background, well contrived shocks, and masterful constructional trickery. Anyone (if there is anyone) who has not read the original *Psycho,* or seen Hitchcock's movie or been told the plot, should be warned its secrets are revealed here.

** E.V. Cunningham: *The Case of the Kidnapped Angel,* Delacorte, $12.95. The cases of Beverly Hills detective Masao Masuto have their attractions, but they seem to start better than they finish. The lesson of this one: Don't imitate S. S. Van Dine (complete with moaning medical examiner, a statement by the Great Detective on page 51 that he knows who did it but won't tell, subsequent murder in a house with the police and all the suspects present, and a final gathering of said suspects to point out the killer) without having a Van Dine-caliber solution. Cunningham, for all his attention to the old-time conventions, breaks one of the most important rules of classical murder selection—but for us to say which

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one would be to say too much.

One of the most colorful and eccentric fictional detectives returns to American print after an absence in Edgar Wallace's *The Murder Book of J. G. Reeder* (Dover, $3.50), a collection of short stories, first published in 1929, about the long-memoried, umbrella-wielding investigator. Not all the tales about the detective with a "criminal mind" have plots worthy of his talents, but the sleuth's personality carries the load.

Another notable reprint is Diane Johnson's *The Shadow Knows* (1974) (Vintage/Random House, $3.50), an interesting example of the use of mystery elements in a mainstream novel. There is nothing snobbish about the distinction—as a novel, this is beautifully written and compelling, but approached as a detective story it doesn't deliver one of the main components: a solution.

Johnson is official biographer of Dashiell Hammett.

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

SEARCH WARRANTED

by K. ANTONIUS

A well heeled young man from Key West
Was partial to only the best.
He joined up with the cops
And combed all the shops
For a gold-plated bulletproof vest.

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MYSTERY

If you love a good mystery, you'll love FATE — the magazine of TRUE mysteries. Each month FATE presents over 40,000 words about unexplained happenings all over the world that will hold you spellbound.

MYSTERY: Amazing reports of ape-like, fur-covered creatures come from the U.S.A., China, India, Africa. Are they present-day survivors of ancient types of man?

MYSTERY: A dead relative seen in a dream warns a woman to avoid an auto trip. She does —and the car crashes. Can the dead communicate with the living?

MYSTERY: The Shroud of Turin, with its remarkable image of an imposing man, is believed to have wrapped the body of Christ. Is it genuine — or a hoax?

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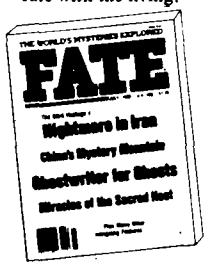

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The murderous impulse. Where does it come from? Have you ever experienced it? Martin Pease did, gentle man though he was . . .

A NASTY LITTLE TRICK

by GEOFFREY BUSH

Martin Pease was too gentle to plot harm against anyone. But fifty is a dangerous age, even for a librarian. And he had not, until that day in August, met ffolkes-Titherton.

Martin was inspecting the stone wall in front of his tidy New England farmhouse. The Virginia creeper he had planted last August was flourishing. Unfortunately, some poison ivy was flourishing there, too. He was about to get his long-sleeved shirt and rubber gloves from the tool shed when a dusty foreign car drove up his driveway.

Although it was a hot afternoon and the car didn't seem the sort that had air-conditioning, all its windows were rolled up. An invisible hand rolled down the driver's window. A round, red, perspiring face was revealed.

"You must be Pease," an extremely well bred English voice stated.

That explained the rolled-up windows. Some Englishmen, Martin had observed at professional conferences, were incapable of coping with an American summer and resorted to the most extraordinary devices. This one appeared to believe that he could keep the heat out by shutting the windows.

What was not explained, however, was the sensation Martin had that it was he, somehow, who was to blame—not only for the weather, but for the dusty state of the car. And for the humble dimensions of his farmhouse. And, perhaps, for his visitor's having lost his way trying to find it.

Martin arranged his neat features in a polite smile. "And you must be ffolkes-Titherton." He stepped forward. "You didn't tell me which day you were coming." ffolkes-Titherton did not respond. Martin, in fact, was addressing the back of ffolkes-Titherton's head. As soon as he had announced Martin's identity, ffolkes-Titherton

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had turned his large flushed countenance away to attend to something inside his vehicle. Now he emerged, buttocks foremost.

It seemed a rather aggressive exit. Or entrance.

"I wonder if you'd bring my bags in for me." On his full rosebud lips there was a grin. It was a challenging grin. "Bad heart, you know."

Martin's smile grew a trifle more strained.

"Certainly."

He looked in the open door. Wedged into the passenger's seat, instead of a bag, was a battered steamer trunk with a rope handle.

He pulled. The trunk would not move.

"Really, old boy, I think you'd better get at it from the other side, don't you?" Few intelligent people, ffolkes-Titherton's humorous tone implied, would have failed to reach this conclusion themselves.

Martin walked around to the other side of the car. In the space of what could scarcely be more than a minute, the entire scene—his driveway, his farmhouse, his stone wall, his modest acreage—had taken on an unreal aspect. As though—but this was absurd, of course—it was no longer altogether certain that they *were* his.

He tugged once more at the steamer trunk.

No result. His smile changed to a grimace. He was conscious of ffolkes-Titherton at the other side of the car shifting position with elaborate patience.

The steamer trunk moved. There was a sharp ripping noise as a chrome strip along the car's dashboard moved with it. ffolkes-Titherton peered inside.

"Not to worry." He sounded unperturbed. He sounded, indeed, quite pleased. "People I was staying with last week lent me this automobile." The loss of a chrome strip, he appeared to be saying, was no more than they deserved. "Least they could have done was lend me their *good* one."

On the second floor of the farmhouse, Martin heaved the trunk onto the bed in the guest room that the day before he had swept and dusted and decorated with a bunch of wild flowers. "I'll bring up your suitcases separately," he said, breathing hard.

"This is my room?" ffolkes-Titherton inquired.

"Yes, it is."

"Let's see." ffolkes-Titherton bent over heavily to gaze out one of its low eighteenth-century windows. "Which direction does it face?"

"East. You'll have the morning sun."

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ffolkes-Titherton chuckled. "Oh, no." He straightened. "Can't have that." He patted the front of his white shirt. "Chap with my condition has to have his eight hours."

"I'm afraid—" Martin began, about to say that this was the only guest room.

"Let's explore, shall we?" ffolkes-Titherton had started down the narrow passageway. He stopped at the doorway to Martin's room. "Just the ticket."

"I suppose—I could move my things into the guest room."

"Awfully kind of you," ffolkes-Titherton said absently. He looked around him. "But not just now," he went on firmly. "I'll have a bit of a read after that tiresome drive." He picked up the book that was lying open on Martin's bedside table. "This might do." Since he was too exhausted, he meant, to read anything else.

Outside, Martin listened to the sound of a tractor performing a distant, rural task.

He looked at the poison ivy. Should he dig it up?

He looked at his hands. They were trembling.

Two days ago he had purchased half of an eye-of-the-round roast. At six o'clock he placed it in the oven.

A few minutes later he heard his bed creak. There was a clumsy tread on the steep stairs. At the other end of the long country kitchen ffolkes-Titherton's corpulent form came into view.

Martin had composed himself. After an unusually trying year—was everyone's fiftieth year unusually trying?—particularly without a wife and children?—he was having a month's rest. He was not going to let himself be upset by ffolkes-Titherton. After all, ffolkes-Titherton was only staying overnight. "A spot of red wine," Martin said cordially, "before dinner?"

ffolkes-Titherton grinned. "Scotch is my tipple."

Without altering his courteous demeanor, Martin turned, opened a cupboard door, and took out a bottle.

"Oh, no. Not that." ffolkes-Titherton's grin disappeared. It was replaced by an opaque stare. "Your *good* Scotch."

Silently, Martin reached farther into the cupboard and withdrew another bottle. It had been given to him on his birthday and he had been saving it for a special occasion.

"Just like the people I was staying with the week before last," ffolkes-Titherton remarked musingly. He had a headful of girlish

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curls. He shook them. "One has to get used to you Americans. You've always got a bottle of the good stuff hidden away."

Martin poured.

"Who are you staying with after this?" It seemed an important point to clarify.

"I've been lent a flat. In Boston."

That was a relief. He handed ffolkes-Titherton a glass.

"Chap claimed it was shut up for the summer," ffolkes-Titherton continued, "but it wasn't."

"Really?" Martin led the way into his simple living room.

"Have I told you, by the way," ffolkes-Titherton said, lowering himself into Martin's easy chair, "how agreeable it is to have this holiday?"

No, Martin said to himself, you haven't. "Delighted," he said aloud, "to meet a colleague."

"Oh, yes. You're in the same trade, aren't you?"

Martin regarded ffolkes-Titherton blankly. He was giving the impression he had forgotten the fact that Martin was the curator of rare books at one of the country's leading small libraries—while he, ffolkes-Titherton, held a decidedly junior position in a decidedly minor institution. It was only thanks to ffolkes-Titherton's begging letter that he was here at all.

"You might say so," Martin said coolly.

"In England we don't take that sort of thing"—ffolkes-Titherton waved a fleshy, deprecating hand—"*work*, you know, terribly seriously."

"I understood," Martin said pointedly, "that you were in the United States looking for a job."

"Did you?" ffolkes-Titherton was amused. "It's true I've received an offer or two. But I'm actually in this country to give advice to a few places—some tips, you know, on how we do things."

For the first time Martin noticed that ffolkes-Titherton's appearance did not quite measure up to his accent. He did not, evidently, own a sports shirt, and his dark trousers were part of a winter suit. The sole of one of his black shoes, resting on Martin's footstool, was nearly worn through.

There was something a bit pathetic about ffolkes-Titherton.

"I'm sure," Martin said in a kindly tone, "they could use your help."

ffolkes-Titherton drained his glass. "But all I want to do now is enjoy myself. Here, with you, for two or three weeks . . ."

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That night, lying awake in the guest room, trying to breathe the still, sultry air—there didn't seem to be enough of it with ffolkes-Titherton in the next room—Martin had thoughts of a kind he'd never had before. It appalled him that he was having them now. He put them out of his mind.

The next morning, after cooking bacon and eggs—"a *proper* breakfast," in ffolkes-Titherton's words—Martin drove him to the beach. ffolkes-Titherton did not swim—"not with a ticker like mine." Nor did he walk. He sat for a time on the sand, his thick thighs crossed awkwardly in his dark trousers, until he announced he should not sit too long in the sun.

There was still an hour to fill before they could have lunch. Martin, having lent him a hat, showed him around the property. "This is my Virginia creeper. I planted it last summer."

"Ah," ffolkes-Titherton said without interest.

"But *this* is poison ivy."

"Looks just the same."

"One has leaves in clusters of three. The other has a single leaf with three points."

"We don't have poison ivy in England." ffolkes-Titherton appeared to be casting doubt on the possibility of its existing anywhere.

"It'll give you a bad rash."

"Can't risk that." ffolkes-Titherton thumped his white shirt. "Not with my trouble."

They had dinner at Martin's second-favorite restaurant, overlooking the harbor. ffolkes-Titherton, assuming the role of wine taster, sent back two bottles in succession. As Martin paid the bill, he was unable to look the proprietor in the eye.

The next morning, Martin awoke feeling on edge. ffolkes-Titherton looked pink-cheeked and robust. Rejecting other forms of diversion, he indicated that a small cocktail party would be in order. "Not just anybody, you know." The opaque stare had returned. "Your *real* friends."

Helplessly, Martin telephoned half a dozen of his most tolerant acquaintances.

That afternoon he watched in anguish as ffolkes-Titherton extracted from one the loan of an expensively illustrated biography ("Martin here doesn't provide much for a chap to read") and prevented another from lighting a cigarette ("Being out-of-doors, you

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know, doesn't make it any better for someone with my problem"). There was nothing Martin could say to them. Soon, he thought desperately, he would explain everything.

On the following morning he didn't propose any joint activities. For the rest of the day he avoided ffolkes-Titherton. When they were forced to meet at lunch and dinner he spoke with an abruptness he didn't bother to conceal.

This new behavior, oddly enough, didn't appear to surprise ffolkes-Titherton. He seemed to be expecting it. Even, Martin fancied once, to be *welcoming* it.

On the fourth day Martin said, "I shall be going to Boston tomorrow."

ffolkes-Titherton stared at him opaquely.

"You'll have to leave."

"I thought you'd say something like that."

"Like what?"

"That's the way you Americans are."

"What way?"

"Not very hospitable, really."

"Is it too much," ffolkes-Titherton said after breakfast the next morning, "to ask you to bring down my bags?"

"Of course not," Martin replied stiffly.

He labored down the stairs in three trips, panting, with the steamer trunk and suitcases.

ffolkes-Titherton was waiting in the driveway. "I shall need some of your American dollars."

Martin emptied his wallet. In the same fashion, no doubt, that ffolkes-Titherton's earlier hosts had purchased their freedom with the loans of the apartment and the car.

"I shan't thank you for this brief visit." ffolkes-Titherton stuffed the bills into his own wallet. "I am quite aware of the grudging spirit in which I was entertained. If 'entertained' is the word."

A pulse was beating in Martin's forehead. He cleared his throat recklessly. "I wonder," he said, "if you would accept a small parting gift."

There was a frown on ffolkes-Titherton's ruddy face.

"A bit of Virginia creeper," Martin went on, "for your apartment."

ffolkes-Titherton's eyes narrowed. Martin walked to the tool shed. He picked out a pot and a trowel and walked back. He knelt. He

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didn't recognize the fingers that grasped the trowel. He had become a new person, capable of anything.

He dug the trowel into the earth.

"Oh, no!" ffolkes-Titherton exclaimed.

Martin didn't move. "Eh?"

"Not that one!"

"Why not?"

"I see what you're up to."

Martin rose unsteadily. "I beg your pardon?"

ffolkes-Titherton's brow had cleared. "You knew I wouldn't remember which was which."

"What do you mean?"

"That's not Virginia creeper, is it?"

"I assure you—"

ffolkes-Titherton was pointing a plump finger. "I'd prefer some of *that*."

Martin knelt. There was a roaring sound in his ears.

"Perhaps you'd be so good," ffolkes-Titherton said, "as to put it in my car."

Martin got to his feet. He opened a rear door and deposited the pot between two suitcases.

"Planning something, were you?"

Martin gestured speechlessly. His breath was coming in quick, painful gasps.

"A rather nasty little trick. Might have made a chap like me quite ill." ffolkes-Titherton glared at him. "*Quite* ill." With angry satisfaction, he clambered into the front seat. "But you overlooked one detail." He slammed the door. "You see, I never take the first thing that's offered me. I send it back. Whatever it is, I make people like you cough up the *real* one."

He snorted. "Didn't take that into account, did you?"

Grinning, he rolled up the window.

Martin stood in the driveway until the car was gone. Then, his heart pounding triumphantly, he started toward the house to wash his hands. He would dig up the rest of the poison ivy tomorrow.

"Q"

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From what Alvin Harris, attorney in the Public Defender's Office, understood, the penitentiary was the best place for spaced-out petty thief Bob Roy Hawley. Steam heat, three squares a day, and lots of time to dry out. David Clay wasn't so sure . . .

SMALL CHANGE

by GARY ALEXANDER

The obvious is not always obvious. Did I paraphrase that or did it just pop into my head? Whichever, the Hawley case was the inspiration and in my profession you'd be advised to live by those words. If you think not, take your sheepskin and your bar-exam results to a Fortune 500 shop and dictate memoranda until age sixty-two.

I am David Clay, an attorney in the Public Defender's Office. I work with human beings and suffer the vagaries of courtrooms. In my trade, the term "gray area" does not apply to IRS deductions—it means innocence versus guilt and, as often as not, the choice between a hand slap and a maximum sentence.

Consider Bob Roy Hawley. Age thirty-eight, alcoholic, fifth-grade education, itinerant farm worker, pathological liar.

On Friday night Mr. Hawley had been surprised by patrol officers while robbing a parking meter on the 2200 block of Blanchard Street. In the pockets of his field jacket, which looked as if it had been abandoned at Khe Sanh, were nickels, dimes, and quarters amounting to $300.05. Also in his possession was a half full (half empty, if you prefer) bottle of high-octane muscatel.

Mr. Hawley was not blessed with good luck. That nickel over three hundred dollars promoted him from a charge of petty theft to that of grand larceny.

The city claims to lose $150,000 per year to parking-meter thieves and few offenders are caught. Perhaps that's why Ape Langlow lowered his head and demanded a mandatory ten-year sentence. Or maybe it was the fact that Mr. Hawley was opening the meter with the key . . .

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I scanned the file Monday morning and the memo paperclipped to it.

C ME ASAP. A.

I took it into Alvin Harris's office. "Not exactly a Willie Sutton, is he?" Alvin said with a smirk.

We are a small office in a medium-sized city—Alvin, myself, and two other low-mileage attorneys. I signed on right out of law school, partly for the experience, partly to build a shell of savvy and cynicism before moving on to private practice and big bucks.

I've been here three years, a more than ample apprenticeship, but I can't seem to break away. Alvin's been at it for twenty, in charge for the past thirteen. He's a terminal bureaucrat, I'm afraid, seduced by the security and the city's excellent fringe package. He's easy enough to get along with if you keep the paper flow lubricated and don't make waves. Alvin and I routinely butt antlers.

"True," I agreed, "but two things bother me. That key Hawley had. And your note that Ape Langlow wants blood. If so, why?"

"That's *three* things, Clay."

Harold (Ape) Langlow, the Prosecutor's Office criminal deputy assigned to the case, was two years ahead of me in law school. While an undergrad, he'd been an all-conference linebacker. Rumor had it that the pros passed him by because he was too mean and aggressive to display on national television.

"Hawley got the key from somebody, but he's not being much help to the detectives," Alvin went on. "Rarely is one of these clowns apprehended, and when one is it's some amateur trying to pry open a meter with a crowbar. Ape figures to make an example out of this rummy."

"That's real justice," I said. "Some poor jerk with three hundred dollars and Ape's going to throw the book at him. We'll see about that."

"*We'll* also do our job, David. There's too much coming up on the docket for you to make a project out of this Hawley. And the last time your heart bled in here it cost a fortune to get the stains out of the carpet. Work with Ape. He'll probably settle for five-to-seven. Hawley will walk in three."

"I can see political hay in this for Ape," I said. "It's no secret he's gearing up to run for Prosecuting Attorney. And Ape doesn't like to plea bargain. He's somewhere to the right of Judge Roy Bean, Alvin. He writes fan letters to Ayatollahs."

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"That's hilarious. And I don't see what your problem is. Just persuade this hillbilly to implicate someone."

"Getting back to that key—was it stolen or is it a copy?" I asked.

"The lab's still working on it, but the prelim is that it's a pretty spiffy piece of home-workshop craftsmanship."

"It says on the arrest report, basically, that Hawley didn't know what planet he was on."

Alvin began shuffling paper and stacking files on his desk—my exit cue. "Go see your client, Clay. From what I understand, the pen is the best place for him. Steam heat, three squares a day, and lots of time to dry out."

I signed in to visit Bob Roy Hawley. Pending his hearing, he was confined to a large cell with other weekend residuals—drunks, shoplifters, and assorted nonviolent types.

Hawley was short, scrawny, and his blotchy complexion showed the effect of bad food and worse booze. He was the quintessential Southern redneck, a Tennessee Williams creation.

I reviewed the file with him.

"Yes, sir, I guess that's how it went."

"Have you ever been in trouble before, Bob Roy?"

"No, sir, never. But it's been hard times. I was hitting the juice and this chance come up. I needed to do something for me and my family."

"How did you come into possession of the key?"

"Well, the apple crop east of the mountains played itself out, so I came over here hoping to get some day labor. Then I could pick up the wife and the five kids and we'd head south for the citrus and the lettuce.

"I got a little lucky rolling the dice and had me around two hundred bucks. I was sitting in this bar and got talking to this guy. We went back to the john and he showed me that key. We even went out so he could show me it worked. So I gave him my cash."

"The description of the man is sketchy. Kind of old, dressed like a merchant seaman, jeans and pea jacket and so forth. This is a seaport town, Bob Roy. That isn't much help."

Bob Roy lit a cigarette with a trembling hand. It had been over two days since his last drink.

"Well, sir," he said, "I been remembering a little more as I think about it. I haven't told them dicks because they were plenty nasty and it probably don't amount to much anyway."

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"Try me."

"Well, he had real thick bushy hair, which you usually don't see on a guy his age."

"A toupee?"

"Don't know. It was awful dark in that joint."

"Anything else?"

"Just that he kind of smelled like oil. You know, that light stuff like you'd use on a bicycle. There wasn't any spots on his clothes that I could see, but there was still that odd smell if you were up real close to him."

I decided to keep that information to myself until I could determine whether it was of value or not. And Hawley's hearing was scheduled in ninety minutes, scarcely enough time to get organized for it.

We drew Judge Catlin, a compassionate man. I felt certain he would release Hawley, a first offender with a large brood to feed, on personal recognizance. Deputies brought him up handcuffed and in jail coveralls. He gave a harmless appearance. I was confident.

Ape came over and shook hands just before we began. I wish I could tell you his knuckles dragged when he walked, but Ape had a good legal mind and always came to court with his homework done.

He handed me a folded sheet of paper. "Read it and weep," he said.

I read, but was too angry to weep—angry at Hawley, not Ape Langlow. Ape was actually doing me a favor, giving me the opportunity to save myself considerable embarrassment.

It was Bob Roy Hawley's "sheet," just arrived via computer. He had four out-of-state priors—auto theft, shoplifting, and two minor-league burglaries. There was no evidence he had ever married, let alone conceived and accepted responsibility for five children.

Ape Langlow trotted out statistics on the parking-meter problem, the millions taken in the past decade, the paucity of convictions, the sharp rise of lost revenue in the preceding eighteen months.

Ape asked for ten thousand dollars' bond.

I could have pleaded in my client's behalf, could have reduced it somewhat, but what would have been the point? A million dollars or a hundred, Bob Roy Hawley was broke.

I let it ride and Judge Catlin agreed to Ape's request. It didn't faze Bob Roy.

When the deputies approached him, he stood and said to me, "I

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hear they're serving chipped beef for supper tonight. That's one of my favorites."

I have something in common with organized-crime lawyers. We're accustomed to being lied to by our clients. And if Bob Roy Hawley didn't care if he served ten years instead of one or two because of a five-cent overage, that was his business. Unlike the organized-crime lawyer, though, I wouldn't be retired in concrete galoshes if I allowed my client to be railroaded without a fight. I would also fight, but for a reason more abstract: professional pride. Regardless of one's past history, one does not deserve ten years for a pocketful of someone else's change.

City Hall occupies only three floors of the County-City Building, but finding the right person and office for a specific need leaves you feeling like a hockey puck. I finally ricocheted into the Engineering Department Traffic Division and (really) Bill Smith.

"We have six hundred and thirty-seven meters," he said. "Collection and maintenance keep five employees busy full time."

"Who collects the coins?"

"All five. I pull the duty too when there are vacations."

"What's the average per meter?"

"Roughly forty dollars," Smith said.

"That's surprising," I said. "They look too small."

"Way back when, it was pennies and nickels. A year and a half ago they jumped the rates. You probably remember the big stink about that. Mostly we take out dimes and quarters. It adds up fast."

"Who has the key?"

"*Keys*," Smith said. "We have six different sets. We're forever changing lock inserts to keep ahead of the bad guys. The keys are checked out through me and returned after every shift."

"Who else would have a set?"

"The City Treasurer's Office. The money goes to them."

"Your people, I assume, are well screened—"

He cut me off crisply. "Long-time employees. Top-notch. If you're thinking inside job, you're barking up the wrong tree. If you're handy it's simple to make a duplicate key. I think how they do it is they back a truck up against the post, rip the meter and the post out by the roots, take it somewhere, crack it open, and make their counterfeit from the insert."

"I imagine it would be helpful if you were a trained locksmith."

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Bill Smith nodded. "You'd have a head start. But people who are natural tinkerers, give them a while and they can make anything."

My father was like that. I never remembered seeing a repairman in our house. "It seems like a lot of work and risk, nevertheless," I said. "A few bucks at a time, converting it into currency."

Bill Smith smiled bitterly. "Used to be, until they pushed through conversion to quarters. See the Treasurer's Office about that. They were the ones behind it. Hell, it costs two-bits for twenty minutes downtown now. No wonder the public is up in arms."

The Treasurer's Utilities Collections Division was charged with electricity, water, sewer, and garbage. Parking-meter receipts were also within their realm. Theft accounted for ten percent of their projected one-point-five million dollars of parking-meter revenue. I could understand why the shrinkage concerned them.

Oswald Patterson was supervisor of parking-meter receipts. He was paunchy and balding, never to see forty again. His suit was shiny, his face the color of bleached bones. Too many years under fluorescent lights, dotting *i*'s and crossing *t*'s.

"Bags of coinage are brought here, as Mr. Smith explained. The funds are poured into a machine that sorts and wraps them. Then they're recorded and taken to the bank."

"I'm mainly interested in keys, Mr. Patterson." I doubted if anyone addressed him as Oz or Ozzie. He wasn't the sort for informality and diminutives.

"Of course we retain keys. It *is* our money, Mr. Clay."

"But your office doesn't use the keys."

"Checks and balances, Mr. Clay. A means of monitoring Engineering and their duty of changing the locks periodically. They couldn't care less once their annual budget is set. If criminals increase their take because of Engineering's laziness, it's *our* revenue that declines."

"Is there anyone in the Engineering Department you'd consider untrustworthy?"

"No. Indifferent yes, criminally inclined no. Excuse me, Mr. Clay."

His phone was ringing. He picked up. "Yes, Mother," he said. "No, I won't forget. Yes, I'm sure. You be careful now. Bye."

He shuffled some papers. "She's been making life miserable for me since she moved out of the apartment into that home," Patterson confided. "But with her arthritic hip, I couldn't leave her unattended all day, could I?"

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"I suppose not," I said evenly.

"And it's not that she doesn't have a measure of independence there. Her own unit with kitchen facilities, a competent nursing staff downstairs—" His voice trailed off. "But that isn't your problem, Mr. Clay. Can I be of further service to you?"

I shook my head and thanked him.

Returning to the office, I called an old friend for a favor. If he had no useful information for me, I would be at a dead end with no choice but to obey Alvin Harris and cease making a "project" of Bob Roy Hawley.

My friend came through. His report was thin but somewhat surprising, sufficient cause to allow the rest of my work to slide for the rest of the day.

I had worked with Detective Sergeant Andy Ballard before. Or, rather, against him. My typical client and the Burglary and Theft Detail often became acquainted. He was a good cop, more interested in doing the right thing than racking up numbers on the monthly arrest-and-conviction board.

"For three hundred bucks, Clay, this is getting to be quite a bother. Ape Langlow's been on the horn five times already, bugging me about grilling Hawley some more."

"The next time you do, Andy, I'd advise you to invite me to sit in."

He lit a large noxious cigar. "You haven't heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Half an hour ago. They took him to the hospital. Delirium tremens."

"Great," I muttered.

"And that twerp Oswald Patterson you want to talk about, I've had three calls from him."

"Why?"

"He's fussing over the city's money—thinks we should be on the verge of busting a parking-meter ring, I guess. A real pain in the backside. And now you, brightening my day with some theory that he was turning out those keys."

"I didn't say that. I said that there were some inconsistencies with his personal finances."

"Who told you?"

"A contact who works for a credit-reporting agency. They're on computers now and he's got a tube and keyboard right on his desk.

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He checked Patterson and every person in Engineering with access to parking-meter keys."

Sergeant Andy Ballard smirked. "Is that legal?"

"Don't ask. At the very least, he'd be canned."

"So what's the deal on Patterson? He's got a young blonde, a Ferrari, and goes to Monaco every year?"

"No. He's a forty-five-year-old bachelor who lives alone, earns $29,855 a year, and drives a beat-up Toyota."

"So?"

"He borrowed a little money last year to have a new engine put in the Toyota. His credit was approved in record time. He owed nothing else, didn't even have a gasoline credit card. He borrowed roughly the same amount the year before to buy some furniture. The bank accounts he listed on the application each time showed balances totaling less than a thousand dollars."

Andy sighed and blew a dirty-blue smoke ring. "So?"

"So you and I should be so fortunate as to live in the retirement home his mother's at when we become old and feeble. She's been there a little less than two years. It isn't somewhere you could go if you lived on Social Security. I called today, asking for their rates. They start at thirteen hundred a month."

"So? Patterson's frugal. He doesn't drink, smoke, or chew—or go out with girls who do."

"His apartment rents for four hundred," I said. "Between them, that adds up to over twenty thousand a year just for rent. Patterson's no swinger, but that doesn't leave much for anything else."

"The old lady's got insurance," Andy suggested.

"Maybe," I conceded.

"Then what's on your mind, Davey?"

"How about a demonstration of the ease with which a burglar can break into an apartment?"

Andy Ballard, as I suspected, would have no part of that, but he agreed to accompany me to Oswald Patterson's apartment house. If we could see inside through the windows, fine; if not, forget it.

The building was old and dignified: red brick, manicured courtyard, and leaded-glass windows. Patterson's unit, fortunately, was on the ground floor, a corner apartment. The structure probably lacked elevators, so I assumed the Pattersons took a first-floor apartment because of his aging mother. Arthritis is a gradual disease—climbing steps must have been painful to her for years.

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The curtains were open on both sets of windows. That was where my luck ended. We had a full view of a small, meticulously clean living room and bedroom. We could see through the bedroom and across the hallway to a second. Beds were made. Hardwood floors gleamed. No trace of clutter. A Persian cat slept on a leather ottoman.

"I ought to hire this guy as a cleaning lady," Andy commented. "You should see my place."

We walked back to my car.

"As you said, Andy, it was a theory."

"You were expecting a metal shop in there? I get the picture of a domineering mother who still blows his nose for him. Pulling lock inserts and duplicating keys is tricky business. She probably did everything for him. I doubt if Patterson could cap a whiskey bottle without crossing the threads."

"End of the line," I said. "Bob Roy Hawley will take his lumps."

"I saw Ape Langlow when he played at the university," Andy said. "The game against Minnesota in his senior year, the blitz was on and the halfback didn't pick him up when he came through. The quarterback was out cold for twenty minutes. I'd have sworn Ape had torn him in half until I saw them load the guy onto the stretcher in one piece. Ape gets that way about some cases too, Davey. This is one of them."

"Is there anything else I can do?"

"A long shot," Andy said thoughtfully. "Every time we get a rash of parking-meter cleanouts, if our manpower situation isn't too tight, we go see wholesale tool companies. Same with the Hawley case now. It's always zilch, but we have to go through the motions."

"I don't understand."

"Parking meters are getting more and more sophisticated to combat the poachers. The new magnetic locks are tough, but it hasn't stopped them yet. You need high-alloy drill bits and once you get inside a lathe is essential to make the key. The hand tools needed to file and carve out all the notches and nooks and crannies aren't available in your friendly neighborhood hardware store."

Andy Ballard's tip perked me up until I finger-walked through the machine-tools classification in the Yellow Pages. There were nineteen of them. On the plus side, most were wholesale only—a mere three sold over the counter to retail customers.

The second I visited gave me what I wanted. Nothing against Andy, but perhaps his crew was asking the wrong questions . . .

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The Surf Estates looked more like a luxury condominium than an old folks' home. It was high-rise, located across the street from a popular local beach. Oak parquet flooring in the lobby. A recreation and day-room area that offered diversions ranging from billiards to big-screen television I had heretofore seen only in taverns. Groups of residents were clustered around a bank of the latest video-game machines.

Mrs. Jennie Patterson lived in 1003. I imagined that her view of the city, especially at night, was spectacular.

When she answered the door, I sized her up as a robust woman, despite her cane. She was large but not obese. Her handshake was firm, her eyes clear and suspicious.

I had considered a hundred ploys but at the moment decided against all of them and introduced myself, explaining what I did and who I represented. She invited me into the living room for a cup of tea.

"I'm at a loss as to why you're here, Mr. Clay. My son has told me about this drunken migrant and the grief he is creating for Oswald Dean and the city."

"Oswald Dean?"

She stopped at the kitchen doorway. "Dean is Oswald's middle name, his father's first name. A reminder, Mr. Clay, of what men can become. Dean was a casualty of World War Two. He didn't have to go, but he did his patriotic duty and volunteered."

"I'm sorry," I said. "In Europe or in the Pacific?"

Jennie Patterson laughed. "A USO floozie in a canteen at Fort Dix, New Jersey. He disappeared from the face of the earth. I'd bet a dollar to a dime the War Department still has him on their desertion rolls."

I was getting a better perspective on the evolution of Oswald Patterson and the possible motivation of kamikaze pilots.

"Oswald seems like a nice guy," I said. "He must've been easier to raise than many of the kids your fellow residents here tell about."

She smiled. "Indeed he was, Mr. Clay. He liked the radio and television and reading. He hardly ever got dirty—until he got his bike. Poor boy, he loved it. Rode it all over the place. But he wasn't much for things mechanical. He came home once with the rear tire flat. The rim had chewed the rubber into shreds. It wasn't a cute umpteen-speed bike like kids have these days, just a single-gear Schwinn. It was the rear tire, like I said. He didn't even notice. I had to tear it apart and grease and oil every single piece. There was

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dirt and grit in the workings like you wouldn't believe. But I put it back together like new for Oswald Dean. When a bum of a husband deserts you and you have his seed to bring up by yourself, you learn some skills or you perish."

She looked at me. "Now, Mr. Clay, some straight talk on your part or I'll have a policeman up here in two shakes."

"Try him," I said, presenting one of Detective Sergeant Andy Ballard's cards. "Mind if I have a look around in the meantime?"

"I do," she said, suddenly ashen.

"Better me than him," I told her. "Andy would be here with a warrant. They tend to be sloppy."

Jennie Patterson slumped heavily into an easy chair. "The cupboards above the microwave—the wide, deep ones."

Alvin Harris and I had a Bob Roy Hawley restrospective in the spring. It was the day before Hawley's release. After he dried out he had been sentenced to six months in the County Jail.

I saw him earlier in the week. He looked terrific. I had high hopes he'd stay off the sauce. He'd put on fifteen pounds and was in good cheer. In winter, he said, even Florida and Imperial Valley could be damn chilly and unpleasant. He gave our jail chow high marks.

"Patterson's bank loans were smoke screens?" Alvin asked. He hadn't really monitored the case.

"Basically, yes," I said. "More of his checks and balances. If he was borrowing money, he felt suspicion wouldn't be on him even if the law snooped."

"How much did he make altogether?"

"Nobody knows for sure, but three hundred a week is a ballpark guess."

"That oil smell Hawley mentioned at his trial and the Pattersons'?" Alvin said.

"Jennie did the keys on her kitchen counter. She kept the lathe and the drill press and the other stuff—all tiny and high-quality—on high cupboards above a microwave oven. Her hands were as good as ever, but Oswald had to bring the machines down for her. Hard alloys require oil for cooling. They were really slimy when I found them."

"What about that machine-tool outfit that clued you in to her?"

"They have hundreds of walk-ins a week, for lathe tools and whatnot. Everyone looks alike, until you inquire about a little old lady with a limp."

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"That piddling money, though. I don't get it."

"Oswald had simple tastes, but his mother was driving him batty. He showed her Surf Estates and when she saw it she decided it was worthy of abandoning her only child for. A few months later, the rent drained Oswald's savings. Jennie was enjoying the amenities and Oswald, for his part, dreaded her return. Momma, as ever, had a solution.

"The lathe, drill press, and hand tools were mail order, but when Jennie burned up a bit or whatever while making a key cylinder, she couldn't wait six weeks for a catalog order so she resorted to the machine-tool outfit."

"So there we are," Alvin said.

"Right. Jennie is on probation, but in lesser digs. Oswald has a parole hearing next month."

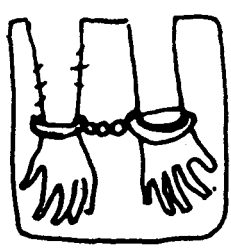
Alvin attended to files and correspondence, his eyes on his desk. I placed my coffee cup on his desk. In it were coins and bills.

"I'm taking up a collection for Hawley, Alvin. When he's released, I'm driving him to the closest freeway exit. He has some plans for Idaho potatoes. Everyone out front has been generous."

"Hmmph. He'll head for the nearest bar."

"He promised he wouldn't. I don't know."

Alvin's ten-dollar donation was predicated on my vow that I wouldn't pester him again until at least Wednesday.



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Almost forty years ago, in the November 1943 issue of EQMM, we published a story that turned out to be one of the most auspicious debuts in the long history of our Department of First Stories—"Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector," the initial story in Lillian de la Torre's unique and much-admired series about the Great Cham.

Of it, John Dickson Carr wrote, "Is it possible that you are not an admirer of Dr. Johnson, as presented either by James Boswell or by Miss de la Torre? If not, I am sorry. But if anyone had told most of us that a writer could turn the Great Lexicographer into a detective and get away with it, I am sure we should not have believed it—until we read the first story."

Similarly, if anyone had told us that a worthy pastiche of Lillian de la Torre's Dr. Sam: Johnson stories could be written—and that it would represent that *author's first published fiction—and that that author would be none other than Miss de la Torre's younger brother—and that it would arrive at our offices exactly in time to be counted Number 600 in EQ's Department of First Stories—we would not have believed it. Until we read it!*

Theodore de la Torre-Bueno is a journeyman artist who has worked and traveled in both Upstate and Downstate New York—hiking, commuting, peace-marching. When complete, his sequential watercolor series, "New York Is," will comprise 250 views of the Hudson River and its watershed from its source in the Adirondacks to its outflow in the Lower Bay of New York Harbor. All the sketches are painted on the site in the open air, using India ink and watercolors.

A veteran of World War II, Mr. de la Torre-Bueno graduated under the GI Bill from the University of Arizona and Columbia University and he studied at the Art Students League of New York. He lives in Astoria, New York, with his wife, Evelyn. Their grown children live in North Carolina and California.

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ABDUCTION INTO THE SERAGLIO

(as witnessed by James Boswell)

by THEODORE de la TORRE-BUENO

"The gypsy musicians have arrived at the royal musick chamber," quoth my learned friend the Great Cham.

"Aye, this I know," said I, "for I saw a parcel of the vagabonds with their women and waggons as I crossed Whitehall."

"I speak not of those raffish folk," chortled the Great Dr. Sam'l Johnson. "Rather did I refer tongue-in-cheek to the musical family from Vienna, whom their own Empress likened to very gypsies for their wandering ways." And ushering me into the newly gessoed chamber-musick salon, Doctor Johnson nodded unobtrusively toward the little group clustered about the gleaming mahogany harpsichord.

A charming sight they were as in great seriousness they arranged their handwritten sheets of musick on their frail little musick-stands in the light of the wax candles. The father in his powdered wig, which had shed a light snow-scattering across the shoulders of his sober broadcloth coat, was clearly in command as he uttered *sotto voce* instructions to his wife, daughter, and young son.

The mother was the very image of a Viennese musical lady with her powdered coiffure and a roguish beauty spot of a five-pointed star setting off the piquant charm of her winsome face and her full figure. I must confess that 'twas the daughter just arrived at youthful womanhood, with the charms of her new-formed bosom tastefully displayed, who instantly won the gallant heart of my humble self, James Boswell the amorous Scotsman. The son was a mere slip of a boy, yet was he dressed in a miniature replica of the father's black and courtly garb, even to the powdered wig.

"Come be acquainted with these worthy folk," urged Doctor Johnson. "Maestro Mozart, my worthy friend James Boswell, whose national instrument is the bagpipe."

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Suffering silently under the cruel jape of my learned friend, I paid the courtesies of a gentleman (even if a North Briton) to the grave maestro and to his charming lady. "Nannerl, my daughter, whom you English would Little Annie call," the Maestro said in his Viennese accent.

Then the boy was introduced. "He has a true Austrian name—Wolfgang Amadeus," said the proud father. The child looked up at me with his great dark liquid eyes. My heart chilled. For I was looking into the eyes of a grown person imprisoned in the body of a young boy.

The Viennese maestro tapped his bow upon his violin and the musical family began to play for the throng of courtiers and court hangers-on. Herr Mozart played the violin while Frau Mozart played upon the harpsichord and my charming Nannerl completed the trio with a viola modestly held in her maidenly lap. Young Wolfgang stood attentively while his talented elders played a beguiling divertissement in the European manner.

"Now is it time for our young man his talent to show," said Herr Mozart after the round of applause for the trio. He sat down at the harpsichord, the boy beside him, and began to play a sprightly marching tune. My eyes were on the dear figure of slender Nannerl as she watched her father and little brother with a tender smile playing about her rosy lips. Then my gaze followed hers and again my heart stopped. For the father was playing one phrase and the boy the next phrase and so on.

The company watched fascinated as the march went into a minuet and the four hands played on in tandem. A burst of applause at the bravura conclusion, when boy and man played out the finale together, was interrupted by a commotion at the rear door.

A ragamuffin band had somehow penetrated the royal grounds and stood crowding into the postern entrance. The gypsy baron, with a colorful kerchief about his curly locks, stood among his women folk holding out a tiny fiddle toward little Wolfgang. In a trice the boy had rushed over and accepted the proffered gift, which the gypsy chief presented in a little speech not without a rude grace in his Egyptian accent. Maestro Mozart stood nonplussed and the guests crowded around in confusion, until the serjeant at arms pushed his way through the crowd and drove the gypsies away with blows and curses.

"Ragged rascals," swore the stout serjeant, " 'tis a very seraglio that furriner carries about in his waggon with his wives and harlots

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about him. 'Ware, melord, lest he's put the eye upon your little tyke here." The little tyke meanwhile was clinging for dear life to the diminutive violin which was exactly proportioned to his slight build. Herr and Frau kept their demeanor but 'twas plain to see that they knew not what to make of this strange turn of affairs.

They returned to the spinet (which these Viennese insisted upon calling a harpsichord) and were just calling on Nannerl to play a number on her little flute when another commotion arose. This was at the main portal of the salon and it was almost as though a royal entrance impended. I gazed at the portly figure of the stately gentleman who made his entrance in the royal livery and accompanied by several pages. His broad Germanic face showed both intelligence and authority.

" 'Tis the royal musick master, Mister Handel," imparted the omniscient Samuel Johnson in a stage whisper.

The Mozart family was introduced to this personage by the principal courtier in the audience, and immediately their roles were reversed. With much bowing and scraping (no pun upon his violin) the foreign maestro invited the great George Handel to lead a quartet. Mister Handel was awarded the violin by Maestro Mozart, who then took the viola from his daughter while his good Frau seated herself at the harpsichord. Then the impromptu band looked around for a second violin.

"Here, Father," spoke the little gentleman for the first time, his violin tucked under his chin like a very *virtuoso*.

"Oh, no, my dear," spoke up the mother. "First you must learn to play, as you have upon the harpsichord."

The boy did not stir.

"Please, little darling," whispered Nannerl, leaning down with a display of her charms which I confess stirred my loins.

More peremptory was the Austrian father. "Go to your room, Wolfgang," said Herr Mozart. The boy's eyes brimmed and he rushed off, clinging to his fiddle and its bow, disappearing through the rear door where the gypsies had been.

The moment of embarrassment was ended when a swarthy young Italian stepped boldly from the audience and with a flourish produced as if by legerdemain a violin and bow from beneath his cloak. With a nod and a smirk, he shamelessly took his place next to my Nannerl.

To my surprise, however, both the great Handel and the Austrian maestro seemed to know this fellow.

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"Messer Salieri the young Italian musick master," volunteered my friend Johnson with a cheery nudge in my ribs. And as though nothing were amiss, the four musicians began an impromptu concert. First they played a fine English piece which everyone recognized as by Handel himself. Then they played something by the Hungarian master Haydn. After that, with much display of modesty, the four offered a piece by Maestro Mozart, full of humorous surprises. Finally, after handing about many handwritten sheets of musick, they played a charming piece by an unknown and unnamed master. Like the others, it was received with a great display of enthusiasm by the brilliant audience, which even a rude Scot like myself could see was of the very cream of London society.

Now the great Mister Handel paid his respects in most courtly manner to Herr and Frau Mozart and to lovely Nannerl, who were all visibly flattered to receive the attentions of such a distinguished gentleman, who held such power and influence at court. Then, leaving his page boys behind, Mister Handel departed by the rear door, like one thoroughly familiar with the royal grounds.

Almost immediately the obsequious Italian made his farewells with many a flourish and not a few leers at the maidenly Nannerl, then boldly rushed out the same back exit, concealing his instruments beneath his cloak. It was disgusting how he hurried after the mighty Royal Musician, clearly hoping to curry favor to further his own career.

A moment of embarrassment at the Italian's vulgar conduct was tactfully broken by the same royal courtier who had introduced Mister Handel to the maestro. This tall and handsome courtier stepped up to the guest of honor and asked him who might be the author of the last, unknown work.

Beaming, the Austrian master revealed his little secret. " 'Tis my son and heir Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who at his tender age writes musick as well as he plays it," said the proud father. "Nannerl, your brother has done his penance. Please to call him forth for his own moment of triumph."

Smiling gratefully, the girl hurried off through the rear door toward the apartment which had been assigned to the musical family from Vienna.

Now came the pleasantest moment of this remarkable musical evening. In the candle light the entire audience shared a glow of pride with the happy parents as they awaited the return from limbo of their dear son.

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Nannerl rushed into the room, bosom heaving, eyes alight, tresses flying. "Wolfgang is gone!" she cried, and broke into sobs. Frau Mozart turned ashen and slipped down off the harpsichord stool in a faint. Herr Mozart stood rigid. The audience flew into pandemonium.

Now the serjeant at arms stepped forward and took command. Higgins was his name, and a black Irishman was he. "This is an abduction, and those wicked gypsy folk must be tracked to their lair, or might I say their seraglio." Such intelligence in one of lower race amazed me, yet needs did I recognize the justice in what he had to say. I glanced at my famous friend, whose sober face showed neither assent nor denial of the Irishman's *deductions*. The serjeant bustled off to raise the guard, and the tall courtier tactfully and quickly cleared the room of all the guests save the Great Cham and my humble self.

The maestro raised his fallen wife.

"Be comforted, *geliebte,*" he cried, "for I will not rest nor repose myself, my bed shall know me no more, until Wolfgang is in your arms again!"

So proclaiming, he gently supported her faltering steps towards their apartment. I found myself, heart beating, sheperding the fair Annie to the same place, where a window opening like a door looked down upon the mews below.

Later that evening, I looked in upon my learned friend the consulting *detector* in his lodgings hard by the baker's. Wreathed in smoke from one of his clay pipes which reposed in the coal scuttle at his feet, he was indulging in his favorite drug, which was neither cocaine nor opium but the notorious brew of *cawfee* from the West Indies. Stretching our legs toward the fire and smoking pipes together, we conversed about the day's strange events. Yet could I not draw out my clever friend about his *solution* to the mystery of the boy's disappearance.

"The window of which you speak is called a *casement,*" drily remarked the famous lexicographer, and this was all I could get out of him.

Leaving Sam'l Johnson's comfortable abode, I wandered the labyrinthine streets of London shrouded in fog as thick as pease-soup, my mind and heart wrought upon by a thousand nameless emotions, until my errant footsteps brought me to the very mews I had viewed that day from the casement window.

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In a flash my mind was made up. I would not this time leave all the *detecting* to my famous friend. Now would I determine for myself how the gypsies—or the abductor or abductors whosoever—had made their illicit entry into the Austrians' apartment. Right glad was I that beneath my cloak I wore at my waist the short sword that was still allowed to those North Britons or Scots who had been loyal to the united crown in the '45. So had I been in act and in fact, being but a child at the time, tho' in my mind I might have been otherwise.

Looking to the other end of the mews I could see in silhouette the two guardsmen passing a coal back and forth to light their pipes and then returning it to the pile of burning coals at their feet. While their backs were turned and the fog shrouded me, I stepped boldly and lightly into the mews and thro' the postern gate, which had been left unlocked. I closed it behind myself and found myself in a narrow after-court directly below the casement which opened over a shed roof onto which the rainspout fed. Before the shed was a pile of fresh horse dung. "Here's a *clew!*" I exclaimed inwardly. "Those brazen gypsies have brought their waggon, or at least their horses, right into the scene of the crime."

Silently and quickly I climbed up the dung pile onto the sloping shed roof. Then grasping the rainspout, I clambered up to the casement and leaned in, resting my elbows on the window sill.

The pease-soup parted for a moment and one roguish moonbeam entered the apartment. There lay Nannerl sleeping in the continental fashion in the buff, and her bed cloathes had conspired with the errant moonbeam to reveal her maidenly bosom.

The same moonbeam revealed another bed in the room. There lay Frau Mozart sleeping with her full figure swaddled in the bed cloathes, and beside her lay—young Wolfgang Amadeus! The fog rolled in again and I was left unable to comprehend or believe what I thought I had seen. Nannerl opened her eyes and said, "Who is there?"

I backed off the window sill, fell heavily on the shed roof, and rolled off into the dung pile. Leaping to my feet, I rushed to the postern gate and found it closed

I ran toward the end of the mews and collided full tilt with a burly ruffian who was standing silent in the fog. He raised a stout stick and I, choosing the better part of valor, reversed my direction and ran full speed back into the mews. My career took me thro' the coals of fire between the two guardsmen.

The guards, smelling of gin, roused themselves, put down their

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pipes, stood up, seized their truncheons and whistles, raised the alarum, and started off in hot pursuit. By this time I was well away in the fog. None the less I did not stop running until I reached my own lodgings, bruised and bleeding, covered with horse dung, with burned feet and a black eye where I had collided with the knobby stick of the mysterious ruffian.

Fully cloathed, I threw myself onto my bed and fell into a drugged sleep full of amorous and explicit dreams of Nannerl, waking in the early morn soaked in sweat and with my garments polluted and my poor eye swollen shut. Calling on my landlady for a hot bath and arnica, I treated my blackened eye with a beefsteak. When the eye was a little better, following the thrifty traditions of my race, I ate the beefsteak *au poivre* for breakfast.

Painfully dressing myself in clean cloathes, I now made my way to the wisest man of my acquaintance (after the Great Cham himself), my friend and tailor Solomon Levi at his shop on Center Street.

With his aquiline nose and deepset thoughtful eyes with the bags under them, his high forehead and the crested head with its natural tonsure, the sandy mustache hanging down over the kindly mouth and the firm chin with the wattle under it, his back bent over his work almost to the point of bearing a hump, this pious Israelite appeared to me like one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, or like one of the Spanish rabbis painted by the great Dutch master Rembrandt.

I applied myself humbly to this wise Hebrew to find out what I could about the Egyptians, as the folk vulgarly called gypsies were known to me. To my surprise the Jew could tell me little or nothing about his fellow Orientals, and indeed insisted that the Romany folk were actually Christians like myself.

Solomon Levi, besides being skilled in his profession of tailoring, possessed a deep knowledge of simples and cabalistic curing, and with his deft hands and warm understanding he soon had me patched up into a semblance of my true self. This curing he considered the gift of his God, and would take no money for it. As I left, refreshed in body and spirit, the worthy Semite gave me gratuitously a piece of information which sent me flying back to confront the Great Cham himself.

"Sir!" I cried, bursting in upon my famous friend in the midst of his lexicographical musings. "I have a new *suspect* in the puzzle of

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the abducted child!" (For I dared not tell him what I had told to the humble Judean.)

"How now, sirrah," quoth Doctor Johnson with the mildest of irony. "What is this new intelligence?"

"It is this, sir," I replied. "I have it on the most trustworthy authority. This English musick master—Mister George Frideric Handel—who is he in truth but the German kappelmeister, Herr Georg Friedrich Händel!" And I looked to see the effect of my disclosure.

Doctor Johnson said nothing but sat looking at me to see if I would add anything to this extraordinary accusation. It occurred to me that whereas being Germanical was odious to a rabid republican like myself, things German were accepted quite easily by royalists like my Tory friend.

"Why then," calmly said the good Doctor, "this Handel/Händel is the same kind of *Englishman* as our royal sovereign King George the Third himself." Overcome by the incisive logic of the great *detector,* I felt my naturally swarthy countenance suffused with a rush of blood. "Now I have something to tell you of this mystery," he continued. "Last night while standing vigil in the mews behind the royal precinct, I observed an intruder climbing to the window of our fair Juliet."

I sat unable to speak or move.

"A swarthy wight in a long cape," continued the omniscient one. I could not blush any darker. Taking my silence for a question, Doctor Johnson concluded: "It was Salieri."

Trembling convulsively, I thanked my Deity for the shortness of my friend's vision. Somehow I stammered out some kind of excuses and took my leave, to wander aimlessly once more through the great rabbit warren of London. Salieri! Antonio Salieri! How had I not seen? Tho' my friend were mistaken in the literalness of his vision, yet was he correct as always in the keenness of his *detection.* I longed to confront the Italian scamp and call him out on the field of honor—yet first must he be forced to yield up the little victim of his abduction.

I came up short in the depths of the Park. I had blundered into the wildest part of these acres and was deep inside a copse of willows. Before me on a ragged lawn was a gypsy encampment. The Romany waggon leaned crazily toward an oriental tent which leaned back in agreement. The two spavinned nags grazed lazily on the grass. And before this setting the gypsies were singing and dancing.

The women folk in their black dresses and red Spanish shawls sat

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in a little half circle by the waggon. Before them the gypsy chieftain—whom I recognized even at this distance—held his fiddle and waved his bow to beat time, while a small gypsy lad played upon his own fiddle and danced as he played. At one side a tall slender gypsy lass with long unaccountably blond hair stood and watched. She had a gypsy kerchief loosely knotted about her slender throat and the gypsy lad had a red bandanna tied about his head.

" 'Ere, Guv'nor, wot's this?" cried a rude voice below me. I had climbed up in the willows the better to see, and now my escape was cut off by two of the sorriest pandours to be found in all London. A patrol of the local constables with their staves of office in their hands, these gentry were hardly less to be feared than the *foot-pads* they were supposed to guard against.

"I meant nothing," said I, stiffly slithering down the willow trunk. "I am a true born Englishman and a loyal subject of His Royal Majesty."

"Stow that," said the Law, "I'll majesty you." Roughly they two laid hands upon me and searched me from top to toe. Having nothing on which to bind me to a magistrate, this precious pair followed the unwritten law of their kind and disarmed me of my short sword and beat me with the flat of it. Then they relieved me of all the money in my purse, and after drubbing me well with their staves of office they drove me away with blows and curses.

Once again I limped home to my bachelor lodgings.

An unexpected visitor awaited me. "Antonio Salieri at your service," said the handsome youth, who rose courteously at the entry of my bedraggled self. I stared in disbelief. The talented violinist of yesterday was in fact nothing but a stripling, a lad scarcely older than the maiden Maria Anna Mozart. The spiky mustachios of the concert were hardly more than peach fuzz and the black wax was mostly gone, leaving a rather charming effect upon the classical features.

"Signor Salieri!" I exclaimed, eyeing him. "To what do I owe the honour of this visitation?"

"To the interest which I perceive that you take," he replied coolly, "in the *famiglia* Mozart and the mystery of the missing little one."

"Which, you may count upon it," said I sternly, "my friend Dr. Sam: Johnson, *detector* of crime and chicane, will resolve in due course."

"Even so." The Italian looked put about; clearly I had hit upon

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his secret intent, which was to get at the *detector*'s ear through me. "Then tell him what I say, for it may cast some light."

"Speak on," I replied shortly, unable to repel the youth in my swordless condition, my back black-and-blue and my clothing covered with the dust of the Park.

"Who are these gypsy fiddlers?" went on the brash young man. "Does it not occur to you that the alleged compositions of this child *prodigy* are actually the outpourings of his unscrupulous parent? Would they be listened to if Leopold Mozart put his own name on them? These musical mountebanks (and he began to become worked up into a state of excitement) who wander around with their guignol and their commedia dell'arte, are they not taking away the livelihood from honest musicians who use their talent and training to make honest musick?"

I gazed at the excitable young Latin for a long time. Then I said: "Where is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart?"

He glared at me in surprise. "Where?" he replied. "Where else but with his father? This whole thing is another rehearsed trick of these charlatans."

I was so amazed by this accusation, and to tell truth so taken with the logical possibility of its being so, that I could reply nothing.

"This fellow is a very Turk lording it over his harem, or his seraglio," continued the Italian. "This show-piece-director will use any trickery or musical ventriloquism to gain the attention of the rich and powerful." And with many flourishes and much show of courtesy, tactfully ignoring my bedraggled state, he took his most punctilious leave.

My mind in a turmoil, this day I applied to the publick bath to recruit my failed strength. Returning to my rooms, I dressed myself in my soberest garb and, looking like a very Quaker, made my way once more to Dr. Sam: Johnson's abode, where I finally brought myself to make a clean breast of it, telling the learned *detector* all about the confusing and contradictory things I had seen the night before and this morning. However, I did not tell of the encounter with young Salieri, for I was inclined to confront the show-piece-director ventriloquist and determine the truth in what the Italian had suggested.

Doctor Johnson listened attentively as I told of the apparition of little Wolfgang in his mother's bed. "It is hard to know what we really see when we think we see," he said slowly. "It might have

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been a crumpled mass of bed-cloathes that you saw; or it might have been the head of the woman's husband wigless and distorted in size by the vagary of *perspective.*"

"No sir, not that," I struck in, "for we heard Herr Mozart forswear his bed until his son should be found."

"You are right," thoughtfully replied the Doctor. "Well then, sir, this continental woman might take a doll to bed; or it might have been an illusion; or it might have been . . . the child Wolfgang." And there he left the matter.

When I came to that morning's view of the gypsy caravan, the learned Doctor listened even more solemnly.

"Now I begin to see it," said he reflectively. "The gypsy lad with the fiddle is our abducted child, Wolfgang Amadeus. The gypsy lass with the blond hair—she must be some other Christian babe kidnapped by the Romany tribe from the cradle. It is time to act." And rising up he put on his great-coat and his big three-cornered hat, and he took from the corner his rugged blackthorn stick which I remembered all too well.

"I go to Serjeant Higgins and to our friend the courtier," said the Great Cham. "Will you with me?"

Much though I would have loved to see the chase and be in at the kill, still did I think the quarry lay in another direction, and that this disregarded Scotsman might yet out-*detect* the great *detector.* I made some excuses about my sore back and my cuts and bruises—which were indeed all too true—and took my leave. Once parted, I made a bee-line to the royal precincts and sought out the musical mountebank from Vienna.

Leopold Mozart greeted me courteously in the drawing-room of his apartment, next to the bed-chamber where I had seen so much I should not have seen and so much I could not understand. In his waistcoat and without his wig, he seemed a different man and much more vulnerable. Under the brown hair streaked with gray, the brown eyes gazed with candor into mine. Almost did I hesitate to call this man a charlatan, yet needs must I grasp the thistle in a firm hand.

"Sir," I said firmly, "what have you done with your son?"

The brown eyes moistened. "Yes, what have I done?" he answered in a voice that came from deep within. "I cannot but think that somehow I have brought this upon myself. Oh my son, where have I failed you?" His voice broke.

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The father had escaped my meaning. Yet I stood mute, unable to rephrase my accusation, and indeed unable to speak.

"What am I, a father, to do?" he continued as though addressing his own soul. I stood dumb. "Have I sinned? Every hour of the night—for I have not slept—I have prayed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to our blessed Virgin Lady that my son will come back to me, and I believe, as I believe in God, that he will. But where have I failed?"

I longed to escape. The man seemed to notice me. "Sir," he said, "you have not fathered a son." This was not exactly true, but I did not wish it to be known. "Some day, sir, you will shoulder that dread responsibility." His voice failed and he stood silent for a long time.

"Was I wrong?" He addressed me as though I were his judge and jury. "Should I not do everything I can to teach my son, and also to discipline and guide him? And when that son has talent?" Unbidden, the voice boomed throughout the room. "No sir, not talent. Without fear of retribution, I say genius! Genius! I say that when Salieri and the other mediocrities are dust, the fame of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart will be eternal. I say that when the divine art of musick is written into history, the name of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart will stand beside that of the immortal Handel himself!" He lapsed into silence.

"Wolfgang, my dearest and only son," he whispered, "and you my beloved and faithful wife, and you my dear sweet loved Nannerl" (he could not continue for a long time) "I tried everything for you. Where have I failed? Where have you gone? Where are you, Amadeus my loved? Where are you, sweet wife and daughter? (he was becoming incoherent) Sitting for long hours silent. Disappearing for long hours. Not speaking to me. Then whispering together. Then weeping. I must believe as I believe in God that you will return."

Not in falling off the shed and not in the beatings in the Park had I suffered such pangs as I now felt inwardly. How could I have accused this man? It was not *he* that had sinned—how could I have sinned so? And like Peter when the cock crew the third time, I hurried out into the mews and wept out my soul.

Evening was coming on. I walked a long way—even throughout the length of the Park without being molested or meeting a soul—and at last with a tranquil and empty mind I walked into the midst of the throng before the royal precincts.

Dr. Samuel Johnson was in charge of the proceeding as the throng,

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guided by the handsome courtier, formed an orderly march into the same royal musick chamber where the mystery had begun. "If last night was a musical moment," said Johnson cheerily to me as though nothing had happened, "tonight will be a musical *impromptu.*" I looked about me with a feeling of *déjà vu*. Here were all the musicians except one.

The three remaining Mozarts took their places about the same harpsichord. Once more Herr Mozart held his violin, looking almost composed, and Nannerl held her little viola, while Frau Mozart seated herself on the spinet's stool. Walking on two canes, Mister George Handel made his entry full of the dignity of his years. No need for powder nor wig, his flowing white locks framed his patriarchal face. His two page boys followed, looking like very angels, one carrying the master's violin and the other no less than two bows.

The impudent Salieri stood shameless in his cloak, his Guarneri under his arm, absently tapping the bow against his thigh. Nor were these the only musicians in attendance. To my amazement Solomon Levi, richly but soberly clad in impeccably tailored garments, stood holding in his hand his Jew's-harp, the instrument upon which King David had played before the Lord.

Perceiving that this was to be an evening of musick for everyone—including Doctor Johnson whose baton was his blackthorn stick—I fished in my inside pocket and brought out my pennywhistle. My bagpipe hung on the wall in my lodgings and in any case I could not play it. 'Twas true the pennywhistle was an Irish and not a Scottish national instrument, but who among these Sassenach was to know?

Serjeant Higgins, his hair black as ink, stepped up to me and said, "So you have my Irish pennywhistle on you," and without more ado took it out of my hand. Since he had his two deputies with him, holding their police whistles, I was in no state to dispute him.

Now entered the featured players. "Bring in the prisoners," said Doctor Johnson.

At the merest inclination of the head by the tall courtier, the serjeant and his men hustled off and bustled back in, leading an extraordinary procession of players. Manacled and chained together, the gypsies entered still carrying their battered fiddles and tambourines. Guarding them on either hand came the two guardsmen from the royal mews with their truncheons and whistles, and the two local constables from the Park with their marrowbones, and

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also carrying my short sword which I was aghast to see had some blood on it.

The gypsy chieftain stood looking over our heads, like Columbus in chains or Spartacus before his crucifiers. Or, I thought bitterly to myself, like one of our true Scottish chiefs of clan with his claymore against the English artillery.

The gypsy's wife stood on one side of him and his mother on the other side, their black dresses torn and draggled but their tambourines held firmly in their hands. Beside them stood also in chains and manacles a frail, swarthy lad, a brunette maid, and an insolent youth clutching his battered fiddle and showing signs of a beating. But nowhere was to be seen the blond lass.

The serjeant at arms stepped forward and produced a paper out of his satchel. "I have here an order from the Magistrate to release, for lack of probable cause, these here prisoners to the care of Doctor Samuel Johnson." Then, clutching the paper and taking a deep breath, Serjeant Higgins went on: "Them there Magistrates with their probable cause, what do they know of what we officers of the law go through in struggling against ruffians like these here? That Magistrate Fielding, what do he know of real life, him sitting there and scribbling his fancies and humors, and us out there on the street fighting for our lifes?"

Doctor Johnson looked at the courtier and the courtier raised one eyebrow. "Strike the shackles," said Johnson.

"You mean strike *off* them shackles, melord," said Serjeant Higgins.

"Strike is the correct word," said the lexicographer drily. "Strike them." Mouth shut tight, Higgins reached to his waist for the keys and struck the shackles.

While the serjeant's men gathered up the manacles and chains and disposed them outside the chamber, my two constables took advantage of the pause to return me my short sword with impudent smirks. Nothing was said about my money, which indeed was not much since the lion's share of my portable wealth lay snug around my belly in a canny money-belt.

When the deputies and constables had returned to their places and the gypsies had tuned their battered fiddles, Mister Handel took his violin from one of his little angels and a bow from the other and struck up the chords of "Greensleeves". The bittersweet tune was one known to all, high and low, and soon the whole motley orchestra was playing together. Even Solomon Levi struck in with his Jew's-

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harp and the rude constables with their marrowbones, while Doctor Johnson kept time with thumps of his stick upon the floor. Only I, standing behind his captain's-chair, was perforce to keep silent while the black Irishman tootled away on my pennywhistle.

"Now," spoke Dr. Samuel Johnson, "the time has come when we must face the question who has abducted our little musician, and in what seraglio he has been sequestrated. For since all the hunters are here together, our quarry cannot be far off." Maestro Mozart here raised his head and gazed at the speaker while his wife and daughter held him by the hands and wept silently.

"Who?" repeated the Doctor. "Could it have been I? No, and for one reason only—because I was here throughout the disappearance. The same reasoning holds true for the gentleman of the court." Here the tall courtier silently inclined his head.

"Could it have been George Handel?" A silence fell. "He was first to leave us before the disappearance, and he might have had motive either to remove a future rival or to raise up a future successor. But these motives are preposterous in view of the character of the *suspect*. And besides, Mister Handel has commingled publicly in the bosom of the court since the disappearance.

"Now, what of Antonio Salieri?" The Italian stirred and looked toward the door. "He too had opportunity, motive in his jealousy, and—no character to support. How can we absolve him? But how convict him?"

A long pause followed.

"Salieri is not guilty because he lacked the place to keep and hide the child," Doctor Johnson answered himself. "He was seen in many parts of London alone and by himself." I nodded. "Besides, a diligent and confidential search of his lodgings revealed nothing." Here it was the gentleman of the court who nodded with the ghost of a smile.

"Before we come to the most obvious suspects, the gypsies and their king, we must clear up some of the minor mysteries." The hackles of my hair began to rise. "Who was the prowler on the shed and at the casement window who was seen by two witnesses?" My hands sweat and my knees shook. Although I could only gaze at the curtain on the little stage behind the gypsy band, yet could I feel all eyes on me and anticipate the serjeant, deputies, constables, and guardsmen converging on me with chains and manacles.

"Who was the watcher in the mews?" continued the great *detector*. "It was myself, and the prowler on the shed was my friend and

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trusted assistant James Boswell, who showed me a clew of the greatest value—the means of ingress and egress for the abduction."

I held firmly to the back of his chair.

"Now we come to the gypsies," continued the implacable interrogator. "Though they have the means and places to conceal, and go about always with a ready motive for abduction—to swell their own ranks—they were not the abductors, because the serjeant and his men conducted them to the postern gate and the palace guards there kept watch that they not re-enter."

Here these officers in turn gravely nodded their heads.

"Finally, our all inclusive method compels us to point to one nearer. Leopold Mozart," said Johnson solemnly.

Slowly the Austrian master stood up. "Do you accuse me?" he asked.

Doctor Johnson answered, "No. It is impossible to impugn a father of your character, and the same goes for a devoted mother."

Someone dropped a pin, and the sound was louder than the musick of "Greensleeves" had been. I looked at my beloved maiden, the image of innocence.

"Nannerl," said Doctor Johnson.

She leaped to her feet.

"Yes," she said, "I did it! This was one tyranny too many, not to allow our little genius to play the fiddle! I showed him the way down the shed and into the court, which I had practiced many times, and I called the gypsies, whom I had visited in their fields, out into the mews. I paid them my allowance to teach him to play the violin. It took but an instant to hide their own little boy under the waggon seat and to fasten a red kerchief on Wolfgang's head, and they were off before the guardsmen knew anything.

"When night fell," continued Nannerl, "I followed the *patteran* to the campground and brought back our little fiddler to spend the night with his mother, for I could not bear her sorrow." Here Frau Mozart, still weeping silently, nodded in her turn. "Two days were all Wolfgang needed to learn the violin, and in my gypsy guise I had just brought him out of the caravan when the *posse* struck. And here he is," she concluded.

The curtains parted on the little stage and there stood Wolfgang Amadeus with his fiddle firmly under his chin like the virtuoso he was. The little man smiled at his father and played a cadenza.

Pandemonium overcame the audience. Leopold Mozart stood thunderstruck. Then, with a visible effort, he overcame himself and let

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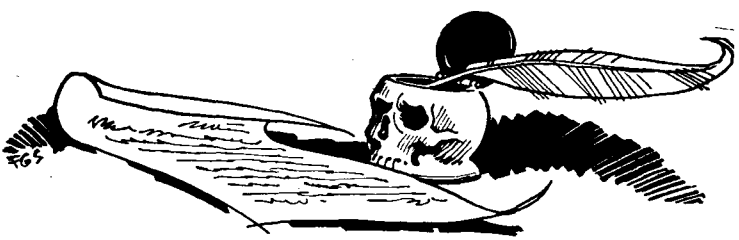
his joy and relief show forth. "Oh, my loved ones," he cried in a strangled voice, and rushing up to the stage he swept Amadeus in his arm and led him back to the bosom of his family.

And here, all embracing one another in tears and forgiveness and joy, we might well leave this happy family.

But the guardsmen were blowing their whistles and the gypsies were playing their tambourines and fiddles, and soon the whole company was playing a happy air together. Soon even the Mozarts were playing on their harpsichord and viola and their two violins. At last even the serjeant gave me back my pennywhistle, and while he thumped on the floor with his staff of office I was myself able to join in the musick of rejoicing.



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DETECTIVERSE

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

by JAMES HOLDING

My personal knowledge of murder
Is gleaned from the stories I read
By tale-telling folk
Like Edward D. Hoch,
And Rendell and Ritchie and others who poke
Into many an illegal deed
And feed
My zest for the mystery breed.

The crimes of their criminals thrill me—
They fill me with wicked delight.
When the murderer chuckles
And tightens his buckles
And chops at his victim with brutal brass knuckles
I'm frightened to turn out the light
At night
Because of my fictional fright.

When Dr. Sam: Johnson's performing
I sit in an awe-stricken trance;
I view with elation
The keen application
Of Jericho's, Wexford's, or Rand's cerebration
To problems like powder-burned pants
Perchance,
Or the poison that ends a romance.

And what does my liking for murder—
This odd predilection—portend?
Why, just that I wish,
Like Garfield or Fish,

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To see every villain get dunked in the dish,
Unable his criminal acts to defend
Or mend,
And Justice prevail in the end.

So here's to the likes of Bob Eckels,
To Gilbert and Symons and Moyes,
And a tip of the beanie
To Lutz and Pronzini
And all who write stories so Ellery Queeny
That, whether they're ladies or boys,
Their ploys
Provide such delectable joys!

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The ladies had pleasant rooms overlooking the park and trained medical supervision. Best of all, they were congenial. But Mrs. Morris couldn't imagine how she had managed before Miss Trillum had come to bless them . . .

KINDRED SPIRITS

by CLEMENTS JORDAN

The ladies had hit an all-time low. The winter had been long and cold, the spring late and chilly. Their spirits were sagging and they had brand new aches. Mrs. Morris had coaxed them out on the sunny side of the porch and they had huddled there obediently, but not even the sight of tight jeans had supplied an invigorating spark of anger. Worst of all, they suffered in silence. No one complained so that her companions tried to cheer her, in the process brightening themselves as well.

Mrs. Morris surveyed them glumly, wondering if any of them would survive another year. The worst setback had been the death of her mother, nearly ninety and a blessing really. But it had brushed the others with the realization that they were mortal—especially Mrs. Rhodes, the oldest. Mrs. Morris could almost see them receding—becoming smaller, paler, *resigned.*

Mrs. Rhodes no longer looked hopeful when the mailbox clanked. Her sister, Miss Chilton, no longer searched out tidbits to read aloud, losing her breath in her enthusiasm. It had been a long time since Mrs. Burton had had a good day. When they mentioned tomorrow, they furtively knocked on wood.

Mrs. Morris had done her best by them. She had cared for two of them for nearly ten years—since her varicose veins had forced her to retire from hospital nursing and her mother's increasing senility made it impossible to leave her alone. Rising costs gulped up her pension and social-security. Their only assets were her mother's house, free and clear, and her own nursing skills. Careful inquiry had brought her Mrs. Rhodes and Miss Chilton, who had lived together for many years and were content to share a room. When her

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last son had married seven years ago, Mrs. Morris had rented his room to Mrs. Burton, whom she had met as a patient in her active nursing days.

None of her three charges could afford a nursing home and Mrs. Morris could not claim to make any great profit from their stay with her. Things were to their mutual benefit, however. The ladies had pleasant rooms overlooking the park and trained medical supervision. They all ate a little better and Mrs. Morris could pay her taxes. Best of all, they were congenial.

Long acquaintance and constant repetition had dulled their comradeship somewhat, however. Mrs. Rhodes had garnered about all the sympathy they had to bestow on her for having been Deserted by her husband for Another Woman when her son was small, for her Trials and Tribulations in having to raise him alone, for the son's Heartless abandonment of her when he married and moved away. Now she was imprisoned in a wheelchair by arthritis and Lived for his Letters with news of his wife and numerous children. He, of course, all too often Forgot All About His Old Mother and seldom sent money.

Miss Chilton—yes, she was Miss, but she hadn't *missed much,* tee hee!—had had an Exciting Life as a salesclerk in a big department store and had hundreds of wondrous anecdotes about co-workers, eccentric customers, and shoplifters. The others had come to know the stories by heart and her fascinating co-workers by name. Miss Chilton appeared quite fit in comparison with the other two. Her body was not wasted and she could read without glasses. But sometimes in the middle of reciting her favorite stories she was shaken by such a paroxysm of coughing that tears streamed down her cheeks. Miss Chilton had emphysema and sometimes the doctor looked grave when he examined her.

Mrs. Burton had hardening of the arteries and sometime wandered, but often her mind was clear and she could recall her divorced husband and the friends and relatives of a lifetime and point out their pictures in a huge box of snapshots. She was a splendid knitter too in good times.

It was natural that these excellent women at times had small grievances and short spells of not speaking. But when one of them became bedridden or went too long without mail, the others rallied to comfort and cosset her and make her feel once more necessary and cherished.

Mrs. Morris hated to upset them further, but prices had risen

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again and she found it necessary to place an ad in the paper to rent her mother's room. Her mother had not been a friend to them—she had lived in a sort of non-world. Mrs. Morris's next charge must be agreeable, someone who could give and take and bend a little.

Miss Trillum was made to order. She was good-natured, cheerful, and *young!* Seventy-eight! Unbelievably, she had no medical problems. She just wanted companionship and somebody's cooking besides her own, she said. She was perfectly willing to clean her own room and wash her few things—she was a stickler for neatness—but if there was anything she hated worse than cooking, which was such a messy process, it was eating what she cooked! Here, with nice ladies like these and the little park across the way to walk in, she could be happy as a queen.

The ladies adored her from the start. Here was someone with new stories, new pictures, dresses they had not seen. Better, she was a new audience. Their cheeks grew pink as they considered things to show her, tell her. Mrs. Burton wondered if she knitted. Miss Chilton asked if she had ever been engaged. Mrs. Rhodes advised against walking in the park. In a park on the other side of town recently a tramp sleeping on a park bench had been found dead with his head caved in. Of course, he had been drunk, she added, so perhaps it had served him right.

"Well, remind me not to get drunk on a bench," Miss Trillum had said gaily and they were delighted. She was *cute!*

That very evening she put on a sweater—the weather was warming up—and stepped out briskly. They looked after her wistfully. Mrs. Rhodes hadn't walked in years except for a little in the house. The last time Miss Chilton had gone out, her breath had deserted her and the policeman on their beat had found her sitting on the bus-stop bench afraid to start home. He had brought her back in his patrol car. She had made a brave story of it, but the incident had frightened her. Mrs. Burton could not be allowed out lest one of her spells come on her. And with Mrs. Morris's veins, walking was no treat for her. She combined errands as best she could and used her beat-up old Dodge for every excursion.

They watched from the windows for Miss Trillum's return and welcomed her home as if from a journey. She came in fresh-cheeked and vigorous. Mrs. Morris said, "I used to be on my feet twelve hours a day at the hospital but now, with these legs, I don't get around much."

Miss Chilton said she had rushed around a lot in her time but had

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had to slow down lately. "And you're younger than I am," she added almost accusingly. She was seventy-nine.

"Well, it's been a while since I've done anything but sit," said Mrs. Rhodes and added that nobody cared whether she came or went. Her husband had left her after she had Worked and Struggled to help him save for a home and spent everything on his lady friend—if that's what you wanted to call her. Her son hadn't even sent her a Mother's Day card. "You're lucky not to be tied to a man, my dear," she continued.

"Yes, I know. My father was an alcoholic and kept us in rags—and in tears," said Miss Trillum. "I expect that has something to do with my single state. I never knew a man I respected enough to take that final step with."

"That was *my* trouble," chimed in Mrs. Burton, "drinking. My husband's, that is. It got so bad I finally had to divorce him."

The kindred spirits swapped stories until bedtime. Even those they'd heard time and time again seemed to have a fresh twist.

By the end of the second week Miss Trillum had endeared herself by dozens of kindnesses. Fetching and carrying, trips to the library. She patiently held the wool around her hands for Mrs.Burton's knitting. She spelled Miss Chilton reading when her vioce gave out. Mrs. Morris couldn't imagine how she had managed before Miss Trillum had come to bless them. She had taken over at least half of the shopping and Mrs. Morris no longer had to dread forgetting some small thing. When she left on her jaunts, they watched her out of sight and greeted her upon her return as joyfully as children expecting treats.

It was by accident that they found she sometimes walked late at night.

It was after midnight and Miss Chilton had a coughing fit and felt she could not breathe lying down. She went to sit by the window in the dark, hoping not to awaken Mrs. Rhodes. As she sat, trying to breathe evenly, she saw what she first thought were shadows of tree branches stirred by the wind moving along the sidewalk. Watching them idly, she nearly lost her breath again when Miss Trillum appeared visible under the corner streetlight and passed into the park.

What ought she to do? Ring the bell each room had to summon help in the night? But *what* help? None of them could go after Miss Trillum. She must surely be aware of the risk she took—a frail lady

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at the mercy of the Lord only knew what night-cloaked villains! Miss Chilton forced herself to relax and to breathe slowly. She decided to wait thirty minutes and then if necessary she would consult Mrs. Morris. She checked her clock with its luminous dial and made an effort to sit still.

As the clock hands moved thirty minutes ahead the effort not to cough became unbearable. Their dear Miss Trillum lay somewhere behind a tree or bush horribly, horribly done by! At the dread thought, coughing overcame her and she had to let it subside before ringing the bell for Mrs. Morris.

Mrs. Morris was as upset as she and so was Mrs. Rhodes, now awake. They gathered at the window to take counsel.

It was again Miss Chilton who saw her, this time emerging from the park. She paused under the light at the entrance, dropping something into the trashcan and wiping her hands with a handkerchief before proceeding toward the house.

"She's all right, thank God. Let's go to bed and not talk with her about this until the morning," urged Mrs. Morris, returning quickly to her own room before they heard the almost noiseless opening and closing of the front door.

But they did not mention it the next morning. Something even more exciting demanded their attention. There was considerable commotion over by the park. Gathering in Miss Chilton's room, they had a fine view of policemen blocking the entrance, barring pedestrians and examining the contents of the trashcan.

Two of them came to the house to ask if the ladies had seen anything during the night, careful to disclose no information. Mrs. Morris was their match. As a nurse she had had to learn how to withhold information coolly. With a nod that encompassed Mrs. Rhodes in her chair and her own bandaged legs, she said, "My ladies and I don't get about much." One of the policemen was the one who had escorted Miss Chilton home from the bus stop. He bowed in recognition before they went away, not really having expected the ladies to have seen anything.

The evening paper satisfied their curiosity. A nameless derelict had been found dead on a bench in the park, his head bashed in with a brick taken, it was thought, from a flower border. The brick had been found in the trashcan outside the park entrance. There were no fingerprints.

Miss Chilton's eyes met Mrs. Morris's. They looked carefully away

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from Miss Trillum. There was a minute's silence, then Mrs. Morris spoke. "One less drain on us taxpayers."

"I'll bet he was a worry to his folks for years," said Mrs. Rhodes. "Running Around, Drinking and Carousing then leaving them to fend for themselves with no Resources."

Miss Chilton looked at Miss Trillum's fastidious little hands. A brick, she mused. So simple. Life was still full of surprises, after all. What would it astonish them with next?

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a *NEW* Lou Mandel story by

LOUIS WEINSTEIN

The romance came straight out of Romeo and Juliet *by way of a Catskill borscht-belt resort—except that next to the Wexlers and the Lipkins, the Montagues and the Capulets were pussycats . . .*

THE LIPKIN-WEXLER AFFAIR

by LOUIS WEINSTEIN

Because alcohol and bad blood don't mix, my father, Phil Mandel,wasn't all that happy about taking the job of referee at the Heshie Wexler-Bessie Lipkin wedding. The romance came straight out of *Romeo and Juliet* by way of a Catskill borscht-belt resort, except that next to the Wexlers and Lipkins, Shakespeare's gang were pussycats. The two families, both big in the bakery business, hated one another from way back, down to in-laws and second cousins. My father and Sol Lipkin, who hired him, were both afraid more blood than chicken soup would be spilled before the night's festivities were over. But with my father's uncluttered work schedule, a night's pay outweighed his misgivings.

A few days before the affair my father asked me, "You busy this Saturday night, Lou?"

"Nothing planned," I answered.

"How'd you like to come along and help out? Four eyes are better than two."

"Glad to oblige you, Pop," I said. "But how would I get in without an invitation? The other-side gag?"

"Why not?" he said.

"Count me in. Will I need a tuxedo?"

"You the groom, getting married?" he growled. "Your graduation

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suit is good enough." He was referring to my high-school graduation less than a year ago.

The other-side trick? All it takes is chutzpah, nerve. The worst that could happen, I'd be booted out. A friend of mine, Allie Cooper, goes to weddings every Saturday and some Sundays too. He just walks in after the place fills up, eats, drinks, dances, meets girls, enjoys. Everyone looks at him, sees a stranger, figures he's from the other side. He picks an empty seat with the young folks, makes himself right at home. After the drinks start flowing and the band gets going, who knows and who cares? And what harm is he doing?

"Anything special I should do?" I asked my father.

"Yeah," he said gloomily, "bring brass knuckles. The party could get rough."

But I don't own brass knuckles—so I did something else. I asked around about the two families. Knowing about them could help.

Harry Lubin—I work for him as a jeweler—turned out to be a gold-mine of information. He plays pinochle with Sol Lipkin once in a while and they're lodge brothers. Lipkin hated Wexler down to his socks, was a hard business competitor, and had a fondness for schnapps. Otherwise, he wasn't so ferocious—a religious, charitable man.

The original trouble between Lipkin and Wexler came when Lipkin somehow got the impression Wexler was showing too much attention to his wife in the small bakeshop in Brownsville they were partners in. Actually, Lipkin caught Wexler pinching his wife in a verboten spot. An argument followed, then pushing, then punching. The result: Lipkin crowned Wexler with a handy strawberry shortcake. To add injury to injury Hannah Lipkin, the pinchee, entered the fray. She bashed Wexler with a trayful of unbaked bagels and then unloaded with everything she could lay her hands on—cheesecake, cream puffs, eclairs. Wexler hotfooted it into the street looking like a charlotte russe, never set foot in the store again, and opened his own place two blocks away. The way my boss told it, the battle in the shop was such a dandy they should have sold tickets—and also for the return bouts staged whenever and wherever the two, and members of their families, happened to meet.

In business competition, Wexler used hoodlum tactics, including letting the air out of and slashing the tires on Lipkin's delivery trucks, beating up on drivers, even hijacking a truck or two. Lipkin paid him back in kind, but hit Wexler where it hurt even more—stealing his customers, luring away his best bakers and sales-

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men, and siccing the health department on him with anonymous tips about uncleanliness and vermin.

Wexler was a woman chaser and a gambler. The horses all year, baseball, basketball, and football in season. A fast-talking, cigar-smoking, big-shot type. His wife Sophie was a gambler, too. Poker and all the rest—big stakes, not friendly games. Also a loud mouth. A chain-smoker. A bossy little Napoleon. They had a married daughter living in Los Angeles; a son, Marshall, a law student and musician; and a couple of other kids besides the groom, who worked in the bakery business.

Saturday night came. Togged out in a borrowed waiter's outfit not more than one size too small, my father drove us to Colonial Palace off the corner of a minor business street in Brooklyn. Lipkin set up the waiter masquerade with the blessing of the Colonial's owner, Morty Kaplowitz. A little folding-money schmeer to the right union official took care of the technicality of a non-union guy working the affair. Kaplowitz was only too glad to have an armed private detective like my father on the premises. In fact, that was a second reason Lipkin hired my father. Over the past couple of months there had been robberies at catering places in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. One, by a gang, was a cleanout. The others, by a lone bandit, were snatch-and-run operations hitting just one victim.

The reception was due to start at seven-thirty but we got there about an hour earlier. On the drive over I made suggestions on what to do if bad trouble developed. Run, was one. Another was holler fire and lead the stampede for the exits. Still another: whip out the old shooting iron and pretend a holdup was in progress. Another suggestion my father took more seriously: locate the main electric panel. Dousing the lights would cool things off until the police arrived.

My father went right in but I lingered outside. It was an old two-story building, almost square, all white on the outside. A flagstone walk led to a faded blue-and-gold-striped canopy outside the glass entrance doors. I went inside for a quick look around. Inside were gold-and-blue walls along a spacious corridor. Off the side near the street were an office, restrooms, pay-phones, a cloakroom, storerooms, and a chapel. I tried all the doors. The utility-room door opposite the kitchen at the end of the corridor was unlocked. Inside were the gas and electric meters, the circuit-breaker panel, a flashlight, candles, matches, and a few mousetraps. Upstairs it was dark—no wedding there tonight.

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I took a peek inside the ballroom off the other side of the corridor. The kitchen was at the far end to the right. Food tables and a bar were being set up at the far wall to the left. Across from the entrance door was a long table for the wedding party, with large circular tables for the guests crowding most of the rest of the room. The band—HERB GOLDMAN'S CONTINENTALS, the sign read—was getting ready along the near wall opposite the wedding-party table and just to the right of the entrance door.

I went back out and paraded up and down the sidewalk, watching the cars parking along the building's front and sides and the early guests strolling toward the canopy. The May night was fairly warm, but not nearly warm enough to keep the family furs from getting an airing. Lipkin had provided my father with some snapshots of his own family and of Wexler, which we'd both studied carefully.

The photographer, a stocky middle-aged man wearing a moustache and a ton of equipment, staggered past me. Younger people, in groups of two and three, came walking from the subway station two blocks away. One girl, a slender, fairly tall redhead wearing a blue dress, was alone. This girl—maybe eighteen, about my age—was a knockout. I guess I stared because she glanced my way and gave me a nice friendly smile as she went past.

When some of the arriving groups got close to one another the women pushed their noses up in the air as if they were hurrying past something put out for sanitation-department pickup. What great fun, I thought, when all this hostility gets wrapped around a few martinis. Old man Lipkin had reason to be worried.

The Lipkins arrived early for picture-taking and other preliminaries. He was medium-height, built like a bakery oven. He had short gray hair and fat cheeks. Hannah Lipkin was tall, blonde, and youthful-looking. Middle-age spread had passed her by with hardly a sideswipe. She was dressed in stylish good taste—a long green gown and a simple string of pearls. She was, Harry Lubin told me, one of the ladies of Hadassah, active in worthy causes. Two kids were with them, one a girl in her late teens lucky enough to look like her mother, the other a tall husky fellow in his early twenties who wasn't so lucky.

The Wexlers reported in right behind them. The two groups almost collided then and there as Wexler and Lipkin exchanged insults, but Hannah Lipkin seized her husband's arm and practically dragged him off toward the entrance.

Wexler was a bullock, almost as big as my father. Bald as a spike,

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strong features, an aggressive manner, lips wrapped around a cigar. Sophie Wexler was of average height but built like a dead-end barricade. Her black-and-silver sequined gown glittered in the canopy lights. Her thick fleshy arms swung aggressively, like a prizefighter's. She looked like a walking jewelry catalogue: fingers of both hands full of rings—ruby, diamond, amethyst; gold bracelets on both arms, one bracelet heavy with charms. But the show stopper was the necklace, crawling with diamonds. If the stones were genuine, the piece was worth a small fortune—and she wasn't going to keep her gems in a vault and pass up this chance to dazzle the Lipkins. With the couple were a chunky, not bad-looking brunette in her early twenties and a younger, teenaged girl.

I made my unobtrusive entrance.

At the bar long lines waited for service. At the food tables the lines were even longer. Hot food enough for a regiment: small meatballs, stuffed cabbage, cocktail franks, chicken, chow mein. Cold appetizers enough to stuff an army: regular salty and Nova Scotia lox, whitefish, sliced sturgeon and smoked carp, pickled and chopped herring, thin half slices of bread topped with salami, bologna, egg salad, cheese, tunafish, and sardines, plates of sliced tomatoes and onions, celery, olives, and pickles. A forespice before the ceremony. A tradition. What kind of wedding is it on an empty stomach?

Some guests wolfed the tasty morsels on the run. Others carted off loaded plates to the tables and shoveled the delicacies down like tomorrow was starvation Sunday. Neither side went thirsty. Waiters circulated with trays of mixed drinks and bite-sized snacks.

I got myself a glass of ginger ale. I'm not much of a drinker and had to keep a clear head. There was a ton of jewelry on display but no one came close to Sophie Wexler for overdoing. It struck me that it would make quite a haul. And Brooklyn was about ripe for a heist.

Right after thinking this, I discovered I wasn't the only othersider present. A thin dark guy with a narrow face and a head of woolly black hair that came to a point high over his scalp was trying to blend into the mob scene. A name for him popped into my mind: Alphead. He had roving, watchful eyes and edged away when anyone came up alongside him. Mixed drink in hand, he kept on the move. But his eyes kept returning to Sophie Wexler. Something about her fascinated him, and I was sure it wasn't her girlish figure. Wherever she went he trailed at a discreet distance.

I was positive he was up to no good. A clasp is no problem to an expert snatch-and-run artist willing to use a little muscle. Would

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he wait till she went to the john, right across from the ballroom door? Grab the necklace, sprint out the front entrance, and disappear before anyone knew what was happening? Or was he playing a waiting game? Wexler and his frau figured to be among the last to leave. Was Alphead planning to hold them up in the parking lot? My father had to know about this. A patrol car outside when the stragglers went to their cars wouldn't hurt.

Herb Goldman's Continentals, going full blast, sounded pretty good. Herb—tall, wavy hair, about thirty—played accordion. There were a drummer, a bass player, a guitarist, a young guy doubling on the saxophone and clarinet, and, unusual for a combo working the wedding and bar mitzvah circuit, a violinist—a little old guy, with a shock of white hair and an innocent young face.

The Lipkins and Wexlers seemed to be gravitating into separate groups. Taking up a position near the bandstand, I watched the dancers. The younger set was gyrating energetically to a rock number. The Lipkins' remarks about the caliber of the Wexlers' dancing included such terms as "truck horse" and "klutz." The Wexlers returned the compliments, saying things like "That guy's got three left feet" and "Who let the elephant out of the zoo?" To tell the truth, I didn't notice any Gene Kellys on either side.

The buzz of conversation got louder and the laughter more raucous as the drinks took hold. Faces grew flushed and damp with perspiration. And the remarks turned nastier and nastier. Lipkin, Sr., was pouring straight whiskey into himself as if he was watering an internal garden. The band went into some disco stuff, then a fox trot. Then Kaplowitz—short, pudgy, and wearing a mechanical smile—said something to Herb, who announced that the ceremony would take place in the chapel in five minutes.

The ceremony was short and sweet. And the singing of "Oh, Promise Me" was short and loud enough to drown out the hateful zingers coming from both sides. The photographer bustled around doing his job. Hannah Lipkin was sobbing a little, the tears perhaps not so much at losing a daughter as for what she was getting in return.

Sophie Wexler didn't look overjoyed herself. She kept turning her head to look scornfully at her one-time rival. I could understand. What woman thinks kind thoughts about a much prettier woman her husband gets pinching ideas about?

Toward the end, both sides got pretty vocal in their derogatory remarks about the wedding partner from the other side. It wasn't

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very kind, on her day of days, to call the bride, loud enough for her to hear, a pishka beauty and a meeskite (a mess). Bessie Lipkin wasn't a beauty but she wasn't that outstanding a disaster. Neither did Heshie Wexler really look as if he slept in a cement mixer. But the couple seemed happy with one another, and once they stamped the wine glass into slivers under the hoopah, the marriage canopy, they belonged to one another, for better or for worse.

Quite a bit of jostling and name-calling occurred as the two camps crowded out into the corridor outside the chapel, but there were no fisticuffs. I was glad there were some sensible folks who didn't want to see the sacred occasion loused up and broke up each squabble before fists started to fly.

I ducked into the men's room. My idea was to wait until all the guests were seated and then pick the safest spot. Alphead evidently had the same idea. He was standing in front of the mirror, pushing a comb through the lower slopes of his hair. Again he raked me over with his eyes. My guess was he wasn't too worried about me. I didn't look old enough to be a cop. If I was onto him, he was onto me too and I couldn't afford to give him away. I left him still fussing with his hair.

I paused at the ballroom entrance. The receiving-line part of the event had left no bodies lying around. I made a fast survey. There was a table near the band with all young people, including the redhead who had smiled at me outside. I slid into an empty chair at the table. She was on the opposite side, but not directly across from me.

Alphead arrived shortly after me, ran his eyes slowly over the room, and moved casually to a spot amid the Wexlers. I was sure he saw and was ducking me.

My father, sweating like a steer, was ladling soup from a big tureen set on a rolling cart. He was doing about as expected, spilling soup on Lipkins and Wexlers impartially and some on the table for good measure. Maybe deliberately, to get them all so sore at him they'd forget about each other. At our table, pouring soup for me, he said in my ear, "So far, so good. No major disasters."

"I don't like the looks of that guy over there," I nodded toward Alphead, and told him he kept eyeing Mrs. Wexler's necklace. "He's got something on his mind besides a free feed."

"We'll watch him, see what happens. As long as he behaves, he's not our worry. We'll get a squad car outside later when everyone heads for home. Let the police worry." And just to show his impar-

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tiality, he slopped some soup on me before moving off to the next table.

The next course was gefulte fish, served with horseradish so strong my eyes watered just looking at it. I ate—and watched—everything. I got a conversation going with the redhead. Her name was Elaine Brodsky and she was a friend of Bessie Lipkin. I asked her straight out how come she was alone. She answered straight out that she could have brought an escort but there was no one she wanted to come with.

The music was going again, the young people pounding the floor in a fast number. Alphead barely tasted the chicken soup and took only one courtesy bite of the gefulte fish, which bit back. His eyes bugged and he pushed the plate away and reached for water. The main course came—filet mignon, browned small potatoes, and peas. Jaws worked happily away. The music played on. Sophie Wexler came over for about the third time and exchanged a few words with the saxophonist, a good-looking guy about twenty-two or -three. I wondered what was with them and I found out when I heard one of the older Lipkins who'd stopped to visit at the table say, "Look at them. Two of a kind. The biggest mother-son gambling combination north of Atlantic City."

Someone else commented: "Imagine, Marshall Wexler so hard up for cash he plays in the band at his brother's wedding."

"Only a Wexler," the older Lipkin said, "could be so insensitive."

A tense situation developed when a Wexler and a Lipkin brushed into one another on the dance floor. The men let go of their partners and took their best Sugar Ray Leonard square-off stances. By luck my father was nearby. He pushed his cart between them. Peas slopped onto the shoes of the two gladiators. My father made humble apologies and the two guys cussed him out as they stomped off to clean themselves up.

During a break, the gnome violinist sat down in the vacant seat beside me. I found out in a hurry he was a chatterbox—a real yenta, into other people's business. Without my asking he told me Marshall Wexler was as interested in studying law as he was in the sex life of the chipmunk. Music and gambling were his hangups. When he went with his mother to Atlantic City it was not to carry her luggage. They were both compulsive gamblers. He played regularly with Herb Goldman's Continentals and with other bands to feed his gambling habit. Sophie Wexler used her visits to Los Angeles as a cover for her gambling jaunts to Las Vegas. This the gnome knew for a

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fact—he and his wife ran into her there and also at Atlantic City. It was terrible, the gnome said, to be hooked on gambling that way. Wexler either didn't know or didn't care about how bad his wife's habit was, just as long as she didn't nag him about *his* bad habits.

While I listened, I never stopped watching Alphead. He hardly ever took his eyes off Sophie Wexler, who marched around in her jewelry like she was carrying the family flag. By this time the main course was about over. Waiters circulated with champagne. Coffee was served. Pies, cakes, and fruit bowls were trotted out and cigars passed around.

The photographer posed groups at each table, forcing Alphead to make a temporary disappearance. Alleycat dancing arrived, without which the wedding couldn't be official, then it was rock time again.

I talked with Elaine, who shifted to the chair alongside mine so we wouldn't have to shout. The musicians left the stand on a break. This time the gnome made a beeline for the bar. Marshall Wexler and the guitarist went out of the ballroom, maybe to the john or for a breath of air outside. Sophie Wexler intercepted Marshall as he was leaving the bandstand and exchanged a few quiet words with him. Her shadow, Alphead, wasn't far off, sort of gliding around, not talking to anyone.

Then suddenly the lights went out. Whammo, and it was pitch black. Immediately the shrieking and shouting started. From close by came sounds of scuffling and a half-strangled voice crying out, "Get your filthy hands off me, what do you think you're doing? Turn the lights on! Help! Thief!"

I recognized the cigarette-hoarse voice. It belonged to Sophie Wexler. I started toward the sound, bumped into someone, and stopped short. I reached out and touched someone. Arms shoved back at me and I swung, a shoulder-high roundhouse swing. My knuckles stung as the blow landed. Just as it did I caught a pretty good shot under the eye and saw stars.

Sophie Wexler was yelling, "I've been attacked! I've been robbed! Don't let him get away—put the lights on!" She sounded more indignant than hysterical.

I felt the floor swaying gently as someone scampered across it. Suddenly there was a little light, narrow yellow flashlight beams stabbing erratically out in the corridor. I caught a fleeting glimpse of a shadowy figure slipping through the door to the corridor. Inside the ballroom, everyone was shouting at once but the guests were too shocked and frightened to go rushing around in the dark.

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Then the lights came on, as unexpectedly as they'd gone off. The hubbub of voices continued. Sophie Wexler was sounding off as she struggled to pull herself up off the floor. "I've been robbed! My necklace is gone—right off my neck. Call the police."

I was closest to her and helped her up. Her throat looked naked without the necklace. There were ugly red marks on her throat.

Her husband came running over. *Lipkin* came running over. *Kaplowitz* came running over. Marshall Wexler appeared from somewhere and hurried over. The bride and groom remained at their place of honor, gazing at one another soulfully. They were in their own world. A love match.

My father lumbered out of the kitchen and pulled up alongside Lipkin. His eyes opened wide when he saw me. My cheek was smarting and when I touched it my fingers came away spotted with blood. My father came over to me and asked softly, "What happened, Lou? Who slugged you?"

"Alphead," I whispered. "But I got him too."

At the same time, Wexler, up close to his wife, was asking, "What happened, Sophie? Are you hurt?"

"When the lights went out," she moaned, her fingers stroking the red marks on her neck, "some hoodlum came up behind me and grabbed me by the throat, ripped the necklace off my neck, and knocked me down."

"Are you hurt?" Wexler asked again.

"A thirty-thousand-dollar necklace gone and he asks me am I hurt," she said.

I piped up. "I tried to stop him. He hit me—but I hit him a good one. Look for a skinny little guy with a lot of black hair and maybe a bloody nose."

"I didn't see anyone," Kaplowitz said, "but I was in the utility room, turning the lights back on. The main circuit breaker was off—too much of a load, I guess. But I can't understand it, it's the first time it's happened in twenty-five years."

"Call the police," Sophie Wexler demanded.

"Don't worry the police—you're insured," Wexler said.

"I don't like to call the police," Kaplowitz said. "It gives the place a bad name."

"Good name, bad name, call the police!" Sophie Wexler insisted.

"I guess I have to," Kaplowitz said.

Wexler was eyeing me suspiciously. He stepped toward me and said, "Who the hell are *you?* Lipkin side? I don't know you. How'd

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you get involved in this?" He looked at Lipkin. "Who the hell is he? What's he doing here?"

It was a bad moment for me. My father edged closer to me. I thought fast and said, "I'm with Elaine. I came with Elaine Brodsky."

"Elaine Brodsky? My daughter's friend?" Lipkin seemed satisfied. "Please, everyone, let's get on with the wedding. It's almost time to cut the cake."

Kaplowitz chimed in, calm as a bug on a leaf. "Let the wedding continue. I'll talk to the police when they come. If they want, they can talk to you all in my office, not out here like a sideshow."

"Good," Lipkin said. "Let's not spoil my Bessie's wedding, she should have nightmares not memories. Everything will be all right."

"For *you*," Wexler objected. "How about for me and my wife? You think a twenty-five-thousand-dollar necklace is something you forget like yesterday's ball scores?"

"Thirty thousand," Sophie Wexler said.

"Thirty thousand? Since when?" Wexler said.

"Since when I had it appraised not long ago."

"The police will handle it," Kaplowitz said. "Let's not have any more trouble. The necklace is insured, so let the insurance company worry."

"Look," I said, "it's none of my business, but the longer you wait to notify the police the further away the thief is getting."

"The boy is right," Lipkin said. "Morty, call the police. Herb, get the music going."

Herb Goldman was sitting, digging into a big cut of meat. He wiped his mouth and started toward the bandstand. "Come on, boys," he said. "Duty calls. Let's hit it."

The band reassembled and began to play. Kaplowitz went to make his phone call and Sophie Wexler collected her handbag for a trip to the powder room. I had something to do in a hurry. Wexler was looking around. But I had to talk to Elaine first. She was already on the dance floor. I broke in and asked her to do me a big favor it was very important that she back up my story that I'd come with her. It was complicated but I'd explain it to her tomorrow if she'd let me.

Her big brown eyes, the wrong color to go with her red hair, took on a puzzled expression. I smiled a desperate smile. She smiled back and said for me not to worry, she'd do what I asked, she was sorry I got hurt trying to catch the thief. Just then old man Wexler came

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charging up and told Elaine he had to talk to her privately. She let him know she didn't like the way he grabbed her arm, but she walked off with him. I went to the kitchen and I got my father's attention. He joined me in the hall.

"What do you think?" I asked.

"Looks like our slugging friend put one over."

"Maybe," I said. "I think there's something fishy going on." I explained why I thought so, then about Elaine. "I'm a Lipkin for the rest of the night."

"Better than a Wexler," my father said. "Keep your fingers crossed nothing else happens. Boy, what a lousy job. The way I'm working, I should get double pay—for the waiter's work on top of the other. Maybe I should talk to Lipkin."

"While you're at it, put in a word for me. You think I like getting slugged for nothing?"

I rejoined Elaine. She'd survived Wexler's third degree. But he was still suspicious. My nerves needed a little steadying, so I sipped some champagne. I made an eyeball inspection. Lipkin was still fortifying himself with whiskey. The marriage couple were feeding one another tidbits. Sophie Wexler was consoling herself by attacking a large chunk of key lime pie, a fast recovery for a dame who had just been assaulted. She was a tough old bird. A lot of women would have fainted or gone into hysterics if they'd been cuffed around the way she was.

Wexler and Lipkin, neither one feeling any pain, got into an argument. They were standing near the ballroom entrance, shouting at one another.

"It's gotta be *your* bread used here tonight. It tastes like sawdust," Wexler said.

"You're knocking my bread? Yours is the world's worst. Starving pigeons fly away from the junk you put out. And your bagels are like cement!"

My father worked his way over. "What's the problem?" he asked.

"None of your business," Wexler snapped at him. "Where'd you get this imitation waiter?" he demanded of Lipkin.

"Morty supplies the waiters, and he supplies the bread," Lipkin said. "I sell him, you sell him, how do I know where the bread came from?"

"You're telling me you're paying for the wedding and it's not your bread? This I don't believe. It's not mine, that I guarantee."

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"Young man," my father said to me, "go tell Mr. Kaplowitz to come here right away, it's important."

"Sure," I said.

Kaplowitz came right out when I explained, and the police sergeant with him in his office tagged along.

"Whose bread did you use tonight? Tell Wexler it wasn't mine so he'll shut his big fat mouth," Lipkin said to Kaplowitz.

Kaplowitz smiled a big smile. "You think I'm crazy or something? Would I use Wexler bread or Lipkin bread at this wedding so one of you should get sore at me? The bread is generic Italian, from Ferrari's, around the corner. So don't argue about it. Shake hands. Be friends."

Wexler looked at the burly police sergeant and huffed off to the wedding table. Lipkin did the same, and immediately poured himself a drink.

The band went into a swing number. The drummer was going wild, and Marshall Wexler was jamming on the clarinet, which he hadn't put down since the music resumed. Herb, the kosher ham, got into the act, anxious to show his all-around virtuosity. He laid down the accordion, picked up Marshall's sax and blew into it. A real crazy note came out. Not sour. Just anemic. Flat, very flat, not loud at all. More like a muffled sputter.

Herb puckered up his lips and tried again. Another dying-duck sound. Marshall swung his head around to look. Herb shrugged a question at Marshall. Marshall shrugged back as if to say how should he know what was wrong, and motioned Herb to put the sax down. Herb latched onto his accordion and began squeezing away. With the old jazz violinist pouring out his hot licks, the fumfering from the sax didn't make a particle of difference. It all happened very fast. And what happened in my mind happened even faster. Click, the pieces had fallen into place.

Again I found my father in the kitchen and out in the corridor told him what I wanted him to do. Then he went his way and I went mine, starting to count to thirty the second we parted.

I joined Elaine at the table and sat facing the bandstand, fixing the location of everything in my mind. All the time I was counting mentally. My father was right on. I was already moving when the count reached thirty and again all the lights went out. Instantly, the noise, the shrieking, and the shouting commenced. I made for the saxophone, lying on the floor. I touched the cool metal, located

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the bell, and reached in with my right hand, elbowing away another reaching hand at the same time.

I withdrew the napkin-wrapped necklace from the bell and stuffed the napkin into my pocket. I lost no time getting back to the table and easing into my chair.

"Elaine, are you all right?" I said, reaching for her hand.

"I'm okay, Lou," she said, sounding as if she was enjoying herself. "This is absolutely the most unusual wedding I've ever been to."

"You can say that again," I said, slipping the napkin and its contents onto the empty dinner plate in front of me.

It wasn't long before the lights came on again. Then, a flashlight still in his hand, Kaplowitz materialized at the bandstand to speak into the mike.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I'm sorry for this second unfortunate interruption. It won't happen again. Be calm. Enjoy yourselves." He didn't sound very calm himself. How could he be calm? After twenty-five trouble-free years, two power failures in one night.

Marshall Wexler wore a look of mixed disbelief, anger, and worry. But I had to give him credit for some fast thinking. He'd almost beaten me to the saxophone. It was his hand I'd knocked away. The lights going out had given him an unexpected opportunity to fish the necklace out of the bell. The napkin-wrapped necklace had caused the muffled note when Herb tried to play the sax. The same sax Marshall had avoided playing because he knew where the necklace was.

My guess was he'd planned to reach into the bell with a napkin first chance he got, making it look like he was swabbing out moisture. Two napkins would come out, including the one wrapped around the necklace, which would end up in the trunk of his car. The first time the lights went out, Sophie had shoved the necklace—phony, probably worth all of twenty dollars—into the sax. Marshall's part in the scheme was to turn the lights out and later retrieve the necklace. They hadn't reckoned on Alphead's making his move for the prize and manhandling Sophie in the process. But Alphead had been too late. The necklace was already in the bell. Exit, Alphead, in a big hurry, making their case against the insurance company even solider.

I didn't ask Elaine to dance and was glad when she excused herself to go to the powder room—I didn't dare leave the table and breathed a sigh of relief when my father came by and efficiently piled the plate onto his rolling cart.

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A minute later he came out of the kitchen and went to the wedding-party table. Sophie Wexler wasn't there. She was in Kaplowitz's office, talking to the police sergeant about the theft. At my suggestion my father had held off on this maneuver until he knew she was in there. I could see Wexler nodding, listening to my father's account of how he found the necklace on a dirty plate, he couldn't tell whose, or how it got there. Then Wexler shrugged and my father, carrying the napkin, went out into the hall and knocked on Kaplowitz's door.

The police sergeant came out first and left. The necklace was found, the assailant had escaped, so why make a big megillah out of a nothing deal? My father and Sophie Wexler left the office together. My father and I exchanged head signals. He nodded to Sophie Wexler and went about his business. I parked myself in front of her, blocking her path. Clutching the napkin and not looking particularly happy, she said belligerently, "You're in my way."

"Can I have a word with you?" I asked.

"What is it you want?" Her eyes were wary.

"You should be happy to get your necklace back, even if it is a fake," I said.

"A fake?" her eyes widened. "Why do you think that?"

"Because I'm a jeweler. And besides, I know the whole story. Think of the trouble it could cause you and your son if it came out. But you don't have to worry. I'll keep it under my hat if you promise me one thing."

"Don't worry so much about me and my son. We can take care of ourselves. What's this about a promise?"

"Let the wedding be a happy occasion. No bickering, no fighting, nothing unpleasant. Forget this old feud nonsense. What are you, hillbillies? Forget what happened years ago. For tonight, anyhow. Maybe longer. Let it be water under the bridge. You might as well get used to getting along with the Lipkins. How could it escape your notice that the Lipkin boy, Lenny, is making goo-goo eyes at your daughter Selma? You carry on about that, you'll only push them into getting cozier. Talk to your husband, tell him to pass the word to call off the war. You're a gambler. You know when you've got a losing hand. Fold your cards. Start a fresh deal."

"You're pretty smart, aren't you?" she said. "Fresh, too."

"If you say so," I answered.

I have to say she made up her mind fast. "Okay, I'll talk to my husband. He'll do what I want."

I didn't doubt that. Formidable was the word for Sophie Wexler.

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I invited Elaine onto the dance floor. As we danced she said, "Boy, you're mysterious. What was that all about?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow," I said. Over her shoulder I was watching the senior Wexlers having a serious conversation. She was pointing to where Lenny Lipkin was dancing with Selma. It was a slow number, "Embraceable You," and he was taking it seriously.

Wexler must have spread the word to his side in record time. My father must have gotten to Lipkin, who would have had to be blinder with booze than he was not to see how it stood with Lenny and Selma. Before too long both sides, every man, woman, and child, were dancing the hora together with so much enthusiasm I thought the dance floor would cave into the basement.

After that, it was smooth sailing—the bridal dance not a war dance; cutting the cake, no casualties; Lipkin and Wexler looking on, beaming, even harmonizing on the "Anniversary Waltz." Till the wind-up, everyone enjoyed except my father, who was walking himself bowlegged clearing tables.

But he needed the exercise, and he felt a lot better at pay-off time when Lipkin, feeling very mellow, paid him not double but triple what they'd agreed on and had a little something left over for me.

Elaine? I told her the whole tale next day and she couldn't stop laughing. We're pretty good friends now, but nothing serious. Not yet, anyhow.

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ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD

"What about that boy?" he asked the plainclothesman. "Isn't he a likelier suspect himself? I mean much more so than a middle-aged, middle-class-if-you-like family man? He's accusing me *to save himself."*

"He seems to be a respectable sort of boy," the sergeant said mildly. "We don't think he seems to be the type."

"And I am!"

"You might have had a compulsion," the sergeant said. "Suddenly, just walking along" . . .

FALSE ARREST

by ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD

Running, he heard indistinct cries behind him, but he didn't turn to look. The next thing he knew he was tackled round the legs and he crashed heavily on the pavement. Someone was kneeling on his back, pinning him down.

Then the hurtful pressure on his spine was relaxed and he was allowed to stand up. There were four or five grouped round now, including the donkey-jacketed youth he thought had pulled him down. A police car arrived.

They didn't talk to him in the car. At the police station his pockets were emptied and he was ushered into a small room with a uniformed constable taking up position at the door. In a little while a middle-aged, tired-looking man in plain clothes came in, accompanied by one of the officers from the patrol car. The constable went out.

The man in plainclothes took the chair across the table opposite him and pronounced his name.

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"For the Lord's sweet sake," he said, "will you please tell me what this is all about?"

"Don't you know?" the plainclothesman asked.

"I do not." He had half heard some of the conversation while he was being held. "Something about a woman being assaulted, knocked down."

"An old lady was mugged and her bag was snatched."

"And that's supposed to be something to do with me?"

"I should tell you I'm Sergeant Burgess, C.I.D.," the plainclothesman said. "I must warn you, you are not obliged to say anything, but anything you do say may be taken down and given in evidence."

"I don't believe it," he said. "Does that mean I'm under arrest?"

"At present you're helping us with our inquiries. Do you wish to make a statement?"

"I have no damned statement to make," he said angrily. "I was just walking along the street. Look, this is totally ridiculous!"

"Running," the uniformed officer corrected. "You were running along the street, according to our witnesses."

"Well, yes, I was. Running or jogging, call it what you like. I usually do that time of night. Is there a law against it? That's what I go out for, exercise."

"And knocking down old ladies."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" he said.

"You deny having seen a woman standing at the bus stop?" asked the sergeant.

"I do. I mean, I don't know. I wasn't paying any attention."

"And you deny hitting her on the face and snatching her bag from her hands?"

"Of course I do."

"Where did the bag come from then?"

"What bag? I never had any bag. I never saw any bag. All I know, I was jogging—running, if you wish—and suddenly someone just threw himself at me and pulled me down. I think it was a boy in a donkey-jacket."

"Her bag was picked up in the street," the uniformed man stated. "The young man said he saw you throw it away just before he caught up with you."

"Well, all I can say is he must be dreaming. Or he's mad. Look," he said suddenly, "if I'm going to be kept here any length of time I want to phone my wife. She'll be worried."

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The sergeant indicated the telephone on the table. "You dial nine for an outside line."

It took a long time for Veronica to answer. She *would* be asleep, he thought, not worried.

"Veronica, listen, there's nothing to be alarmed about," he said into the telephone. "But I'm at the police station and I don't know exactly how long they'll be keeping me here."

"Oh, yes," she said, her voice still drowsy. "What happened?"

"It seems I'm supposed—" He corrected himself. "I'm helping them with their inquiries. I was a witness of an incident. An old woman was mugged, apparently."

"Oh, dear—was she badly hurt?"

"I don't know. I don't know very much about it. But I expect I'll be home soon. I just wanted to let you know where I am, that's all. Go back to bed."

"All right," Veronica said. "I'll probably hear you when you come in."

He put down the receiver and faced the sergeant again. He was aware he was sweating.

"You know who I am," he said, trying to keep his voice calm. "I presume you've been through my wallet. You'll have seen I was carrying—what?—thirty, forty pounds. You probably also noticed my credit cards. I keep my current account fairly low, never much more than a thousand. But I've some six thousand in my deposit account, besides moderately substantial investments of which I can give you details. I have no debts. I am an architect by profession, employed by a large firm of property developers, earning," he added deliberately, "at a guess a salary some three times yours at least. Now, does it seem to you likely—" his voice rising "—that I'm the sort of man who goes out and beats up old women for the sake of a few miserable pounds?"

There was a brief silence.

"It doesn't seem likely," the sergeant said. "Not on the surface. But then you see we have this witness."

He swore with disgust. Then something occurred to him. "What about the alleged victim? She isn't saying she can identify me?"

The sergeant shook his head. "She couldn't see who hit her. After that, she was on the ground."

"She's been taken to hospital," the uniformed man informed him.

"Well! —Well, I hope she isn't too badly hurt," he said.

"Likely just shaken up a bit."

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"I'm glad of that. All the same, is anyone else supposed to have seen me hit her? Or seen me with the bag? Or is it just that one boy's story?"

He could tell from the sergeant's expression there was no one else.

"Why should he make up a tale like that if it isn't true?" the sergeant asked.

"For heaven's sake, that's surely something you'll have to ask him."

"Do you have any enemies? Anyone you can think of who might try to frame you with something like this?"

He considered momentarily, then he said, "That's too fantastic for words."

"Doesn't sound very plausible," the sergeant agreed. "So there we are then." He spoke with a kind of finality.

There was a further silence. He could feel a surge of apprehension. "Look," he said in a rush, "what about that boy? Isn't he a likelier suspect himself? I mean much more so than a middle-aged, middle-class-if-you-like family man? He's accusing *me* to save himself."

"He seems to be a respectable sort of boy," the sergeant said mildly. "We don't think he seems to be the type."

"And I am!"

"You might have had a compulsion," the sergeant said. "Suddenly, just walking along."

"An irresistible impulse," the uniformed man added.

"You hate old women."

"They remind you of your mother."

"Perhaps you hate your mother."

"You wanted to hurt her, to humiliate her."

God, he thought, psychology! He restrained himself from making any jibe. Besides, he could sense they didn't really believe it—the aggressiveness of their training-course act was just a last throw. "My mother's been dead for some time now," he said flatly. "Be that as it may about the boy," he went on, "that's up to you. I consider I have a legitimate complaint, a double complaint. I was assaulted in the street—I'll have bruises to show for it. Plus a rip in my trousers. And now I'm detained here without my consent."

"Not detained, sir," the sergeant said. "Like I told you, you've been helping us with our inquiries."

Noting the "sir" and the tense of the last sentence, he said, "Then I'm at liberty to go?"

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The sergeant looked at him hard, then he said: "We may want to see you again, sir, to get a formal statement."

"Yes. Well, I shall be available, I expect." He rose to his feet.

As they were returning his wallet and other belongings to him, he asked, trying to control the anger that had succeeded his relief: "Do you propose to give me a lift home now? I'd say it's the least you can do."

The desk sergeant told him shortly that no police car was available. He was allowed to call a taxi. While waiting, he looked at his watch and was surprised to find it had been less than an hour altogether.

When he got home, Veronica didn't even wake up as he crawled into the adjoining twin bed.

In the morning he told her all about it, making as light of it as possible. She said he ought to sue, either the boy or the police, or both, and advised him to speak to his solicitor.

"I don't know about suing anyone," he replied. "I thought of it at first, but since then I've slept on it. Still, you're right, I ought to have a word with Harry Spencer, just in case."

He telephoned from the office and told Harry what had happened. Harry seemed more amused than anything. Perhaps it was the way he'd told the story.

"It's all right your laughing, Harry," he said, "but it wasn't all that funny at the time, I can tell you. I was getting more than a little scared. They'd gone on much longer I might have started believing I'd actually done it."

Harry's attitude altered. "I can see it might have been a frightening experience," he said. "These things do happen, I know. I can't say you're quite the type to be conned into a false confession though. But mistaken identity, yes, that's got innocent people into the dirt before now. Do you want me to take it up?"

"It scarcely seems worthwhile," he said. "A lot of trouble, and what would I get out of it in the end? Not even a new pair of trousers."

"I'm afraid that's probably true," Harry said. "Still, get in touch with me if there's any follow-up."

Nothing happened for four days. Any lingering shock, alarm, even his sense of outrage had just about evaporated. Then he got a telephone call from the sergeant saying he wanted to see him again. He

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refused to go to the police station; he told the sergeant he could have the trouble of visiting him.

Then he called Harry to tell him of this latest development.

"Not worried about it, are you?" Harry said.

"No, not really. Not at all."

"I'll come along if you like."

"I don't see why I should have to pay for your services," he said jokingly. "As well as a new pair of trousers."

Harry laughed. Then, more professionally, gave a reminder that he need not say anything at all to the police if he didn't wish to, and that he shouldn't agree to sign anything.

"That's all right. I'm not worried," he said again. "Not any more."

"Ring me if there's any nonsense."

"Yes," he said. "All right."

The sergeant came alone. Veronica was at the bridge club. His son, as ever, was out somewhere. His daughter had locked herself in her room with the record-player. Despite himself he felt a shade nervous as he opened the door to let the policeman in.

He could detect a subtle difference in the sergeant's approach straightaway. It was neither deferential nor apologetic exactly—rather, he thought, resigned, as though going through a process to which he had become inured but not absolutely reconciled. He asked him into the lounge and to sit down, but decided against offering a drink or a coffee.

"We have finished our investigations," the sergeant said. "I'm here to tell you formally we're not proposing to take any further action."

"I see," he said after a moment. "Thank you very much. But what you're really saying is, you still think—"

"I'm not thinking anything, sir," the sergeant interrupted. "I'm just telling you we're not in a position to bring a charge against anyone. I wanted to let you know this, personally."

"And that's the end of it, is it?"

"Unless, of course, at a later stage we should get a confession. That sometimes happens."

"And what about the wrong done to me?" he said.

"It's open to you to pursue any course of action you wish, sir, if you have any complaint."

"Complaint!" he said bitterly. "After what you put me through? I doubt if you appreciate what it's like—the indignity, the strain.

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Even when one knows one's— But a fat lot of good any complaint would do me, eh? And that's what you call justice!"

"We had a witness, sir," the sergeant said woodenly. "We were obliged to investigate his allegation. We would have been failing in our duty otherwise."

"So you made a false arrest."

"I told you at the time, sir," the sergeant said, a glimmer of dislike showing through, "at no time were you under arrest. Your assistance was voluntary."

"Voluntary!" He gave a sarcastic laugh. He thought of several more things he might say, but contented himself with standing up to indicate that as far as he was concerned the interview was at an end. The sergeant appeared more relieved than anything else.

"By the way," he asked in the hallway, "how's the old lady?"

"She should be going home in a couple of days," the sergeant replied. "So long as there are no complications."

"That's good."

"Well, thank you, sir," the sergeant said. "Good night."

"Good night," he echoed.

When Veronica came home, he told her the substance of the sergeant's visit. She still thought it wasn't good enough and he ought to do something about it. He said there was little he could do, but to pacify her he agreed to have another word in the morning with Harry Spencer. He didn't go out for his customary evening exercise.

That night, for the first time since the incident, he slept badly. Lying wide awake, listening to Veronica's throaty, somehow unbearably gross breathing, he thought of his mother. He remembered her burnished elegance, her dignity and pride, and the force of a maternal love so all embracing it was difficult even now to realize she had gone.

Surely it was not true that he hated her.

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

He'd first questioned Theresa Leary after the knifing at The Beachcomber, a singles bar at the beach. That was on Saturday night. On Sunday night he'd helped rob a jewelry salesman at the airport. In each case he identified himself as Captain Leopold.

Lieutenant Fletcher's wife read a lot of mystic stuff and she said having a double was like having a ghost. It was called a Doppelganger in German—and when someone came face to face with his Doppelganger he died . . .

THE SECOND CAPTAIN LEOPOLD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was a messy, tragic Saturday-night stabbing.

Lieutenant Fletcher had parked behind the flashing red lights of a police cruiser and crossed the wet pavement to The Beachcomber, a popular singles bar on the edge of the Sound. Pushing through the crowd of gawkers, he recognized Glazer and Winstead, the patrol-car cops, who were taking down the names and addresses of witnesses. There was nothing to be done for the victim, a wiry-haired man of about thirty who had caught a knife in the chest just inside the door of the men's room.

"What's it look like?" Fletcher asked Pete Glazer, a muscular young rookie with a ruddy complexion. "Any arrests?"

"They say a fellow named Randy Costa did it and then ran away. They were arguing over a girl and the victim—his name is Greg Simmons—went into the men's room. Costa followed him in and

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then came out running. He was gone before anyone realized what happened. Win radioed in a pickup order."

Fletcher glanced around at the remaining bar patrons. Not surprisingly, many of them had left the scene before the police arrived. Of the few who remained, a sobbing dark-haired girl appeared to be the focus of interest. He walked over to her and asked, "Did you know the dead man?"

"I—yes. Greg and Randy both."

"Did they argue over you?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

"Could you give me your name?"

"I already gave it to the other officer. It's Theresa Leary."

"All right, Theresa. Suppose you sit down in this booth over here. I have to ask you a few questions."

"I already told the other officer the whole story."

"Which one?" He nodded toward Glazer and Winstead.

"No, the other one. He's gone now. He said he was a captain or something. He was here right after it happened, before the police came. I think he might have been at the bar."

Fletcher sighed, excused himself, and walked back over to Glazer. "Did we have a man in the place when it happened?"

The officer looked blank. "Not that I know of."

"She says someone questioned her. She thinks it was a captain."

"There are only three captains in the whole department."

"Yeah. She was probably mistaken."

That was on Saturday night. By Sunday evening the police were searching for Randy Costa throughout southern New England and New York, but he seemed to have vanished from sight. And for the moment, Fletcher thought no more about the captain who had questioned Theresa Leary.

Sergeant Connie Trent didn't like working Sunday nights. It was the finish of the weekend, a quiet time when traffic accidents were generally a greater problem than violent crime. She usually spent the time catching up on her office paperwork. There was the search for Randy Costa to be pursued, of course, but she suspected he was already far away, perhaps in another state. That had been the weekend's only killing. Apparently the intermittent autumn rain had put a damper on passions.

Captain Leopold had been in the squadroom earlier checking on the Costa thing, but he'd been gone about an hour when the call

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came in about the airport assault. A jewelry salesman had been slugged and robbed in the parking lot as he left his car on the way to catch a Sunday-night flight to Chicago.

Connie tracked the man in the hospital emergency ward, sitting patiently while his head was bandaged. "We don't think there's a concussion," the intern told her. "But we'll keep him overnight."

The salesman's name was Frank Broderick. He was balding and middle-aged, but he had a tough conditioned look about him that might have given some muggers pause. "How much were you carrying?" Connie asked him.

"Better than a quarter of a million dollars wholesale."

"It wasn't just chance that they picked you?"

"No," Broderick said with a sigh. "Someone has to have tipped them off."

"Tell me what happened."

"I'd just locked my car and taken the sample case out of the trunk when I saw a man approaching between the cars. In my business you always carry a gun, and I instinctively reached for it. Then the man identified himself as a detective captain and I felt a little better. He said the police had a tip that someone would try to rob me at the airport and he offered to escort me to my plane. Naturally I thanked him and started walking with him. We hadn't gone more than a couple of car lengths when a second man came out from behind a parked van. This supposed police captain grabbed me in a bear hug and the second man hit me over the head with a blackjack. When I came to, they were gone."

Connie Trent looked up from her notes. "Did this bogus detective give you his name?"

"I think he said it was Leopold."

She shook her head. "He certainly picked a good one. The captain will get a laugh out of this."

But when she mentioned the incident to Fletcher the following morning, he didn't laugh. Instead he remembered the Saturday-night incident and the captain who questioned the woman in the bar, then disappeared when the police arrived.

"Do you think there's a connection between the two?" Connie asked. "Do you think it's the same impostor?"

Fletcher shrugged. "We'd better go tell him about it."

Captain Leopold was at his desk. He listened to Fletcher and Connie with a scowl that gradually disappeared, and by the time

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they'd finished he chuckled a bit. "I guess the only thing it proves is that I've been getting too much publicity. But you don't really know the two incidents are related. The woman in the bar didn't mention my name."

"I'd like to check on that," Fletcher said. "I think I'll talk to Theresa Leary again."

The story of the airport robbery was in Monday afternoon's paper, and some enterprising reporter had caught the Leopold angle and dug his photo out of the newspaper files. There was a small one-column picture of him with the story, along with a photo of the victim, Frank Broderick. By the time Fletcher reached Theresa Leary's apartment after lunch she'd already seen it. "That's the man," she said, pointing at the picture of Leopold.

"What man?" Fletcher asked cautiously.

"The captain who questioned me on Saturday night."

"It was this man? Captain Leopold?"

"Sure. I recognize the picture."

"You don't think you could be mistaken?"

She shook her head. "He's the one."

"Had you noticed him in the bar earlier, before the stabbing?"

"Like I told you, he appeared so quickly I think he must have been there already."

"What about Randy Costa? Has he made any attempt to contact you?"

"No, and he won't. He's probably all the way to California by now."

Fletcher glanced around at the neat apartment. "Am I keeping you from work or anything?"

"No. I got laid off back in the summer. If nothing turns up soon I might move down to Florida."

"How did you get to know Costa and Simmons?"

"At the bar. They were always around on Saturday nights."

"Did you go out with either of them?"

"Heck, no! I got my own boy friend. But you know how things are at a bar—you get talking and one thing leads to another—I guess they both had the wrong idea."

Fletcher decided she'd recovered quickly from the shock of the Saturday-night killing. If Costa and Simmons had thought she mattered enough to fight over they'd been mistaken. "I may want to talk to you again," he said as he left. "If you decide to leave town let me know first."

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He returned to headquarters not knowing quite what to make of her identification of Leopold's picture—and found Connie Trent with an identical problem. "That jewelry salesman, Frank Broderick, just phoned," she told him. "He identified the picture in the afternoon paper as the man who helped rob him."

"He identified Leopold?"

"That's right."

Fletcher sat down hard. "What do you think, Connie? Is there any slight possibility—?"

She shook her head vigorously. "He was in here last night checking on the Costa manhunt. That was about an hour before I took the report of the airport robbery. He would have had to leave here and drive to the airport in fifteen minutes."

"It could probably be done on a Sunday night," Fletcher pointed out. "There's not that much traffic."

"Fletcher, do you really believe he could have done it? Even if you had twenty witnesses?"

"No. Of course not."

"Then I guess we'd better tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"That he's got a double."

Leopold hadn't really considered his appearance in years. Since the failure of his only marriage and a later brief love affair, he'd thought little about the opposite sex and how they might react to him.

The idea of someone looking like him, close enough to be mistaken for him, amused him at first. "Who'd want to look like me?" he asked.

"A criminal, apparently," Connie said.

"But he committed only one crime that we know of. What happens the next time, when the whole department's out looking for him? Every cop on the beat knows me by sight, and they're going to know this double by sight too."

"Maybe they'll arrest you instead," Fletcher suggested glumly. "Maybe the double will be here sitting at your desk some morning."

"Nuts! I can't believe he looks that much like me. It's one thing to bear a resemblance to a newspaper photo and quite another to fool someone who knows me."

Connie and Fletcher were both uneasy. "Can we put out an arrest order using your description?" she asked.

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"Of course. I'm as anxious as you are to catch this guy." Another thought occurred to him and he asked, "Have you considered the possibility that I've developed some sort of split personality and I'm going around being a criminal on my nights off?"

"We've considered it," Fletcher admitted. "Connie says you were here last night. You probably couldn't have reached the airport in time to pull the job."

"Thanks—then I'm in the clear. What does this fellow Broderick say about the second man—my accomplice? Maybe he looks like you, Fletcher."

"Hell, Captain, you're making a joke of this."

"No, I'm not. But I think you're taking it too seriously. This is going to turn out to be some two-bit hood, probably from out of town, who we'll probably lock up within forty-eight hours."

"How did a two-bit hood know about the jewelry salesman?"

"Maybe he got lucky. But I'll admit that's worth checking. Find out who knew Broderick's flight schedule, Connie. An office secretary, perhaps, who made the reservation. She might have mentioned it to a friend."

As they were leaving, Fletcher turned and said, "Try to be a bit careful, Captain. This guy might decide to come after you."

"Thanks for the advice, but I doubt it. If he harmed me, there'd be no point in being my double any more. Besides, they didn't kill Broderick. I don't peg him for a murderer."

"Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Well, Captain, we haven't sorted out everything that happened in the singles bar Saturday night. Doesn't it seem like a big coincidence that this false Leopold should be on the scene of two different crimes in two nights? We know he was involved in Sunday's robbery. Maybe he had something to do with Saturday's killing too."

"Maybe," Leopold admitted. He was thinking about the accomplice in the parking lot. "You might ask Connie to show Broderick a photo of Randy Costa, just in case."

"We've still got nothing but that high-school picture, Captain. It's not much for identification."

"Try it anyway," Leopold said.

The name of Randy Costa had been nagging at Leopold's memory from the beginning, which was why he'd stopped by headquarters Sunday night to see how the search was progressing. The man had

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no criminal record and not much of any other sort of record, either. He was unmarried, a 28-year-old drifter who'd stayed in town when his parents moved to California a few years back. The furnished room where he'd been living offered scant clues. Fletcher had come up with his high-school photo and little else.

As Leopold sat puzzling over it, Connie Trent poked her head into his office. "I'm on my way over to the hospital to show Broderick that Costa photo. If you're free I'd like you to come along. Maybe he'll take one look at you in the flesh and decide you're nothing like the Leopold that robbed him."

"Good idea, Connie. I should have thought of it myself."

He put the problem of Randy Costa aside for the moment and accompanied Connie to the hospital.

Frank Broderick was just finishing getting dressed when they reached his room. "The doctor says I can go home. My head's okay," he told Connie, and then froze as he saw Leopold enter the room behind her. "That's him!" he said. "That's the man who pinned my arms while the other one hit me!"

"No, this is the real Captain Leopold," Connie explained. "The man who accosted you was an impostor."

Broderick studied Leopold and still didn't seem too sure. "Maybe. His face might have been a little thinner. But you sure look like him. Have you got a twin brother?"

"Not that I know of," Leopold said.

Connie took out the photo of Randy Costa. "I want you to look at this picture carefully and tell me if you've ever seen the man before."

Frank Broderick sat down on the edge of the bed and studied the picture. "It's just a kid."

"That's his high-school photo taken ten years ago."

He shook his head. "I don't know him, unless he's changed a great deal."

"How good a look did you get at the man who hit you?" Leopold asked.

"Not much. He was young and not too tall, but that was about it."

"Could it have been a woman dressed in man's clothes?"

"I suppose it might have been. I hadn't thought of that. But I think it was a man."

Leopold nodded. "Did someone at your office make the plane reservation for you?"

"Katie Palmer. She makes the plane and hotel reservations for all the salesmen."

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"Who else might have known what time your plane left? Are you married?"

"Separated. My wife and kids are in Atlanta. No one else would have known my schedule, but I suppose they could have followed me from home."

"You kept the jewelry at home over the weekend?"

"No, I stopped by the office before I left and got it out of the safe."

"Was anyone else there?"

He shook his head. "Not on a Sunday night."

Leopold had another idea. "Do you ever go to bars on Saturday evenings?"

"Rarely. Never alone, if that's what you mean."

"How about a singles bar down by the Sound?"

"No."

"So you couldn't have let it slip about your trip?"

"Not a chance."

"All right," Leopold said. "We might stop by your office to talk with Katie Palmer."

The office was on a high floor in one of the city's newer downtown buildings. There was a small jewelry showroom open to the public, but most of the space was given over to the firm's wholesale operations. Leopold and Connie could see the imposing metal door of a medium-sized vault as they waited for Katie Palmer to appear.

She was an older woman, easily past forty and making no attempt to look younger. "The travel plans of our salesmen are always top secret," she explained. "Our insurance carrier insists upon it. I make the reservations and tell the departure time to no one except the person involved. Even the firm's partners have no knowledge of individual times or flight numbers, though they do know what hotels we use in various cities."

"Is a Sunday-night departure unusual?" Connie asked.

"Not unusual, but not routine either. Frank Broderick had a Monday-morning appointment in Milwaukee. I had him booked on a late flight to Chicago, with a rental car standing by. He phoned Sunday morning to tell me he'd switched his reservation to the earlier 8:11 flight so he'd reach his Milwaukee hotel by midnight."

"And he picked up the jewelry here on his way to the airport?"

She nodded. "They're not allowed to keep it at home."

"Has your company been robbed before?" Leopold asked.

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"Not this office. Our salesmen are armed, you know. That discourages robberies."

"It didn't discourage the one last night."

"No," she admitted.

It was late afternoon when they returned to headquarters, and Leopold was far from satisfied. He asked Fletcher to check the records for anything on Randy Costa. "That name keeps bugging me. It would have been about a year ago. I think we questioned him about something."

Fletcher nodded. "I was thinking, Captain—since this Broderick saw you, maybe I should bring in Theresa Leary to have a look at you, too. Just to cover all the bases."

"It wouldn't hurt," Leopold agreed.

But as it turned out, Leopold didn't get to meet Theresa Leary until the following day. His attention was diverted by Patrolman Pete Glazer, who walked into his office a few minutes after Fletcher's departure and announced, "I got your message, Captain. What do you want to see me about?"

Leopold looked blank. "Message? I sent you no message, Glazer."

"That's funny. I was out at The Beachcomber and—"

"The bar where Simmons was stabbed Saturday night?"

"Yeah. I went out there this afternoon, after my shift ended at four. I wanted to do a little looking around on my own. I was out in back and the bartender came out to say you'd phoned for me."

"Why would I phone you there when I didn't know you were there?" Leopold asked reasonably.

The cop shrugged. "I don't know. He said you wanted to see me right away so I came down."

"What's the bartender's name?"

Glazer consulted his notes from the previous Saturday's killing. "I think his name's Sammy but I don't have it here. He wasn't on duty Saturday."

"Okay, you can take off. I didn't want you for anything."

"Right, Captain."

"Oh, one thing, Glazer. What were you looking for out in back of The Beachcomber?"

"I just got to thinking that if I'd stabbed someone in the john I wouldn't have run out the front door where there might be people to grab me. I'd have tried for the back door and along the beach."

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"Good thinking," Leopold agreed. "I'll take a trip out there tomorrow."

After Glazer had gone, Leopold tried to puzzle out this latest action of his double. He had no doubt that the man who'd made the phone call was the same one who'd questioned the girl on Saturday night and robbed Frank Broderick on Sunday.

But why was he doing it?

Had his target been Simmons, the stabbing victim, or Broderick's sample case of jewelry?

Or was the ultimate target Leopold himself?

In the morning Leopold went with Fletcher to call on Theresa Leary. Her apartment was slant across the street from The Beachcomber, on the second floor of an old but freshly painted double house. A gray-haired woman watched from the downstairs window as they went up.

Theresa Leary was a shapely brunette in her twenties. "I'm glad you stopped by," she told Fletcher. "It saves me a phone call."

"You have new information?"

"No, but I'm going to Florida and you said to notify you." Then she noticed Leopold and said simply, "You back again?"

He merely smiled. "I don't believe we've met before."

"Sure we have—you questioned me at the bar after the stabbing Saturday."

Leopold and Fletcher exchanged glances. "Take a good look," Leopold instructed her. "Are you sure I'm the same man?"

"Well—pretty sure. Maybe your voice is a bit different."

"I assure you it was a different person," Leopold said. "But while I'm here I do have some questions to ask you. What can you tell me about Randy Costa's background? How long have you known him?"

She shrugged. "Not long. I saw him around the bar a few times, with Simmons."

"The murder victim."

"Yeah."

"But they were fighting over you, weren't they?"

"I guess so. That doesn't mean I was involved."

Leopold had an idea. While Fletcher stayed with her, he went out to the car and returned with all the glossy photographs he could find. There were two of himself, in different poses, a blowup of Costa's picture, a morgue shot of Simmons, the news photo of Frank Broderick, and even an off-duty picture of Pete Glazer taken at the sum-

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mer picnic. "I want you to tell me which of these people you've seen before," he told Theresa Leary. "Study them carefully."

She squinted at the pictures and asked, "Is this some sort of trick? Here's Randy. And Greg Simmons. And these two are you."

"Are you certain they're both me?"

"Yes."

"What about the others?"

She tossed Broderick aside. "Never saw that one before. But this is the cop who was at the bar Saturday night, isn't it?"

"That's right. Officer Glazer." Leopold put away the pictures. "Thank you for your help."

"Is it all right if I go to Florida?"

Leopold turned to Fletcher, who said, "We'll need an address where you can be contacted. When Costa is arrested your testimony will be required."

After leaving the apartment, Leopold and Fletcher continued on to The Beachcomber. The weather had turned cloudy and there was a hint of autumn rain in the air. "Why did you show her all those photos?" Fletcher asked.

"I wanted to see how much faces really meant to her. She was pretty good. She recognized Glazer out of uniform even though she'd only seen him briefly on Saturday night."

"So?"

"So I have to take her word that the man who questioned her earlier really did look like me."

"My wife reads a lot of this mystic stuff," Fletcher said uneasily. "She says sometimes a double is like a ghost. They call it a Doppelganger in German, and when someone comes face to face with their own double they're supposed to die."

Leopold snorted. "What am I supposed to say to that?"

"Nothing, Captain. I just meant you should be careful, that's all."

It wasn't yet noon when they reached The Beachcomber, but the door was open and a bartender was inside checking his stock. "You open for business?" Leopold asked.

"Just about. What'll you have?"

"Are you Sammy?"

"That's me."

Leopold and Fletcher identified themselves. "We want to ask you about yesterday."

"Yesterday was Monday. The killing was Saturday."

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"Yesterday," Leopold repeated. "Officer Glazer was out back looking around and you told him I'd called. You gave him a message from me."

"Oh, sure—I remember now. I forgot the name for a minute."

"Do you remember my voice?"

"Jeez, I don't know. I get a hundred calls a day, you know? Somebody named Leopold called and gave me a message for the cop, that's all. I delivered it like I was supposed to."

Leopold nodded. "What's out back?" he asked, pointing to the rear exit.

"Just the beach."

"I'd like to take a look."

Leopold went on back and out the door. It wasn't a cheerful scene on a cloudy October morning, and he turned up the collar of his raincoat as he started across the sand. He glanced around for Fletcher, but the lieutenant had remained in the bar.

Leopold didn't really know what he was seeking, but the call from his double had been intended to lure Glazer away from something—of that he was convinced. He stopped walking and stood for a moment looking along the beach to the east. There were several houses visible, but he knew that most of them had already been closed up for the winter. Only a few hardy souls lived here year-round. In the other direction the view was a bit different, with a few restaurants and a public beach taking the place of the houses. He noticed a large metal shed behind the restaurant next door, apparently a storage place for beach chairs and the like.

He walked over to it and tried the door. A padlock was in place, but it hadn't been snapped shut. People could be careless with their property, he thought, slipping the padlock out of its staple and lifting the hasp to open the shed door. The place was dark inside, but he could see beach chairs and a few small tables piled neatly against the storms of winter.

He saw something else too.

He snapped on his pocket flashlight and confirmed that it was a foot—the foot of a body that was all but hidden from view behind the chairs. The body of Randy Costa. He hadn't run very far at all.

"Stand right there," a voice behind him said. He turned and saw Fletcher in the shed doorway with a revolver in his hand. A chill went through Leopold.

"It's me, Fletcher."

"I know, Captain, but—" The revolver didn't waver.

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"Ask me something, Fletcher."

He moistened his lips. "What's my wife's name?"

"Carol," Leopold said without hesitation.

Fletcher sighed and put the gun away. "Sorry, Captain."

"That's all right. I've found Costa. We'd better get the crew out here."

When the medical examiner had completed his autopsy, the results were phoned to Leopold's office. Randy Costa had died of a single gunshot wound in the back, fired from a distance of a few feet at most. The bullet was a .38 caliber, the same as Leopold carried in his service revolver, and he had an odd sense of déjà vu, remembering the time a bandit had stolen a gun from his car and used it for a series of robberies. He sent his own revolver over to be test-fired and waited for the results.

"That's foolish," Connie assured him. "The gun's been in your possession all the time. How could it have been used to kill Costa?"

"Stranger things have happened," he replied glumly. But within an hour ballistics phoned to say the bullets didn't match.

"At least he's not using my gun along with my face," Leopold said.

"You think this second Leopold killed Costa?"

"The autopsy indicates he was shot sometime Saturday night, probably within hours of the stabbing. He must have hid in that shed and someone went out there to meet him."

"And kill him," Connie added. "But why the false Leopold?"

"We know from Theresa Leary's testimony that he was at the bar, and left when the patrol car came. Isn't it likely he went out the back way, the same as Costa, and came upon Costa's hiding place?"

"Sure, but why kill him?"

Leopold shrugged. "Maybe *he'd* stabbed Simmons and Costa saw him."

"If Costa wasn't guilty, why'd he run away?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted.

Fletcher came in with his report. "No one at either restaurant admits hearing a shot Saturday night. And no one else identified your picture, Captain. I suppose that shed, combined with the sound from the water, could have muffled the shot."

Leopold agreed. "Most people ignore a single gunshot anyway. They think it's something else and forget about it." He noticed Fletcher was carrying a plastic evidence bag. "Find anything in his pockets?"

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"The usual stuff. This notebook is the only thing of any real interest. It's got your name in it."

"My name?"

Fletcher showed it to him. There were perforated pages that could be torn out and discarded after use. Only the top page had any writing on it—the single word *Leopold*—and, further down, the number *8:11*.

Leopold stared hard at the notebook page. Suddenly he remembered where he'd known Randy Costa before.

"It was out at the airport," he told Connie and Fletcher. "Remember that air-freight robbery about a year ago? Costa was working in the baggage department. We questioned him but never charged him with anything."

"How did this note remind you of that?" Connie asked.

"Don't you remember? Katie Palmer at Broderick's office told us that 8:11 was the departure time for his flight to Chicago."

"Then there *is* a connection between the two crimes," Fletcher said. "The false Leopold was at the bar with Costa planning the robbery."

"Looks like it," Leopold agreed. "Now all we have to do is find him."

"Where do we look?"

"Dig out the records an any airport crimes within the past year or so. I want everything we've got, especially the names of any other possible suspects. We need to find someone who was linked with Costa."

Fletcher and Connie went to work and Leopold felt as if he was getting somewhere with the case for the first time. When he left the office that afternoon he was certain they were close to a solution. Driving home to his apartment he turned over the likely theories in his mind.

Randy Costa, experienced at airport crime, plotted the robbery of Broderick's jewel case with the false Leopold at The Beachcomber on Saturday night. But something happened. A falling out of thieves or a fight over a girl, it didn't matter which. Costa killed Simmons and hid in the beach shed, but later the false Leopold had to kill him because he knew too much about the airport plans. A new accomplice was recruited and they went through with the robbery on schedule, probably following Broderick to the airport from his office.

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It all fit nicely except for one nagging thing.

A block from his house he turned the car around and headed for the waterfront.

The rain that had threatened all day finally let go as he parked down the street from Theresa Leary's apartment. It was almost night now and the thick clouds that obscured the setting sun seemed only to hurry the darkness. As he ran through the pelting drops to her building he suddenly remembered that his revolver hadn't come back from the ballistics lab. He had another in the glove compartment of the car, but he wouldn't go back for it now. The rain was too heavy.

He took off his coat and shook it as he climbed the stairs to the second floor, not even certain she'd be home. When he saw the door standing slightly ajar he again felt that sense of déjà vu. It was the metal shed on the beach once more, and the darkness beyond the entrance beckoning him on.

He remembered what Carol Fletcher had said about Doppelgangers.

"Miss Leary?" he said softly into the darkness of the room.

Then a sudden flash of lightning showed him the body on the floor.

As he'd been too late for Randy Costa, he was too late for Theresa Leary.

But he saw the shape standing above her and knew he was not too late for the second Captain Leopold, not too late to face his Doppelganger at last.

"So we finally meet," he said. "I'm arresting you for murder and robbery." His hand dropped automatically to the empty holster on his belt as he saw the revolver in the other's hand start to rise.

"You didn't have to kill her too," Leopold said, words his only weapon now.

Then the lightning came again and he saw the face before him over the barrel of the gun. It wasn't the face in the mirror that he'd half feared.

It was the face of Frank Broderick.

"Why are you here?" Broderick asked. "Are there others outside?"

"The house is surrounded. You can't get away."

The jewelry salesman chuckled. "I don't believe that for a minute. Answer me—why are you here?"

"My supposed phone call to the bar last night, when Officer Glazer started snooping around out back—it had to be made by someone

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close enough to see Glazer and want him out of there. Then I remembered this apartment slant-across the street. It was the most likely place for the false Leopold to call from."

"I didn't want to kill her," Broderick said. "But she knew I'd shot Costa and she wanted a bigger share. She and Costa were going to fake a robbery at the airport—hold me up in front of witnesses. Then he got into that damn fool fight over her and killed someone. I wasn't there but she phoned me right away and told me where he was hiding. I couldn't have him roaming around with every cop in town looking for him, so I killed him and left him in the shed. Then I made the phone call to keep the cop away from the shed till we figured how to move the body. We faked the robbery without him, of course. Theresa hit me on the head, not too hard, and took the sample case."

"And the false Leopold?"

"That was Costa's idea. He remembered you'd questioned him once and he thought it would be a great gag if we faked a robbery sometime and gave the police your name and description. With him and Theresa pulling the job in front of witnesses we couldn't do it, but once he was dead she remembered it and figured it would be good misdirection. She started the ball rolling in the bar with that story about the captain questioning her, and I added to it, pinning the robbery on you. We figured you'd go off looking for a double and leave us alone. But you couldn't know Theresa and I were friends. The story only stood up with two independent witnesses."

Leopold nodded, his hand frozen at his side. "I showed her some photos this morning. She tossed yours aside and said she'd never seen it before, but it was the news photo that was in the paper right next to the picture of me she identified. It's possible she saw my picture and didn't notice the one next to it, but she was pretty good on faces. That and the closeness of her apartment to the bar decided me to come here tonight. I'm sorry I didn't make it ten minutes earlier."

"Five minutes earlier would have been enough," Broderick said. "Those are the breaks. Five minutes *later* and I'd have been gone. And you'd have been walking out of here alive."

"There was one other thing to link you to Costa" Leopold told him. "He had the time of your flight, 8:11, written in his notebook. Katie Palmer at your office said you called Sunday morning to say you'd changed to the earlier flight. But Costa was already dead then. Only you could have told him about the earlier flight before he died. You

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probably phoned him Saturday afternoon and he wrote the time under my name, still thinking he might use my description somehow. That was before he killed Simmons and you decided he was too dangerous to keep alive."

"They're right when they say one killing leads to another. Simmons' death caused me to shoot Costa, and then Theresa, and now you."

Leopold saw the twitch of his eyelid and dove to one side as the gun fired. He tried to come in under Broderick, but the man swung the pistol against his head and stunned him. Then the flashing lights of a police car were suddenly playing on the walls of the room. Broderick cursed and ran for the door.

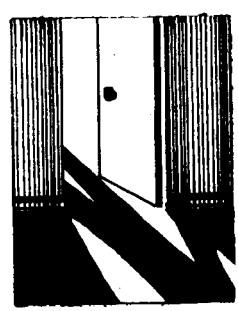
Leopold lifted himself from the floor and made it to the window. There were two cars in the street, and he could see Fletcher and Connie through the pelting rain. "He's got a gun!" Leopold shouted in warning.

Broderick burst through the downstairs door and Leopold heard three quick shots. By the time he got there, the jewelry salesman was sprawled in the rain-soaked street as Fletcher and two uniformed policemen worked over him.

"Are you all right?" Connie asked Leopold.

"Just barely, but Theresa Leary is dead upstairs. How come you're here?"

"The woman in the downstairs apartment reported hearing a shot, and Fletcher recognized the address." She gave him a smile and a heavy sigh of relief. "This was one time someone didn't ignore a single gunshot."



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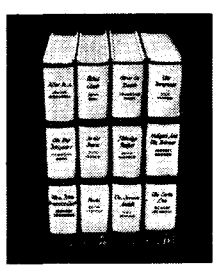

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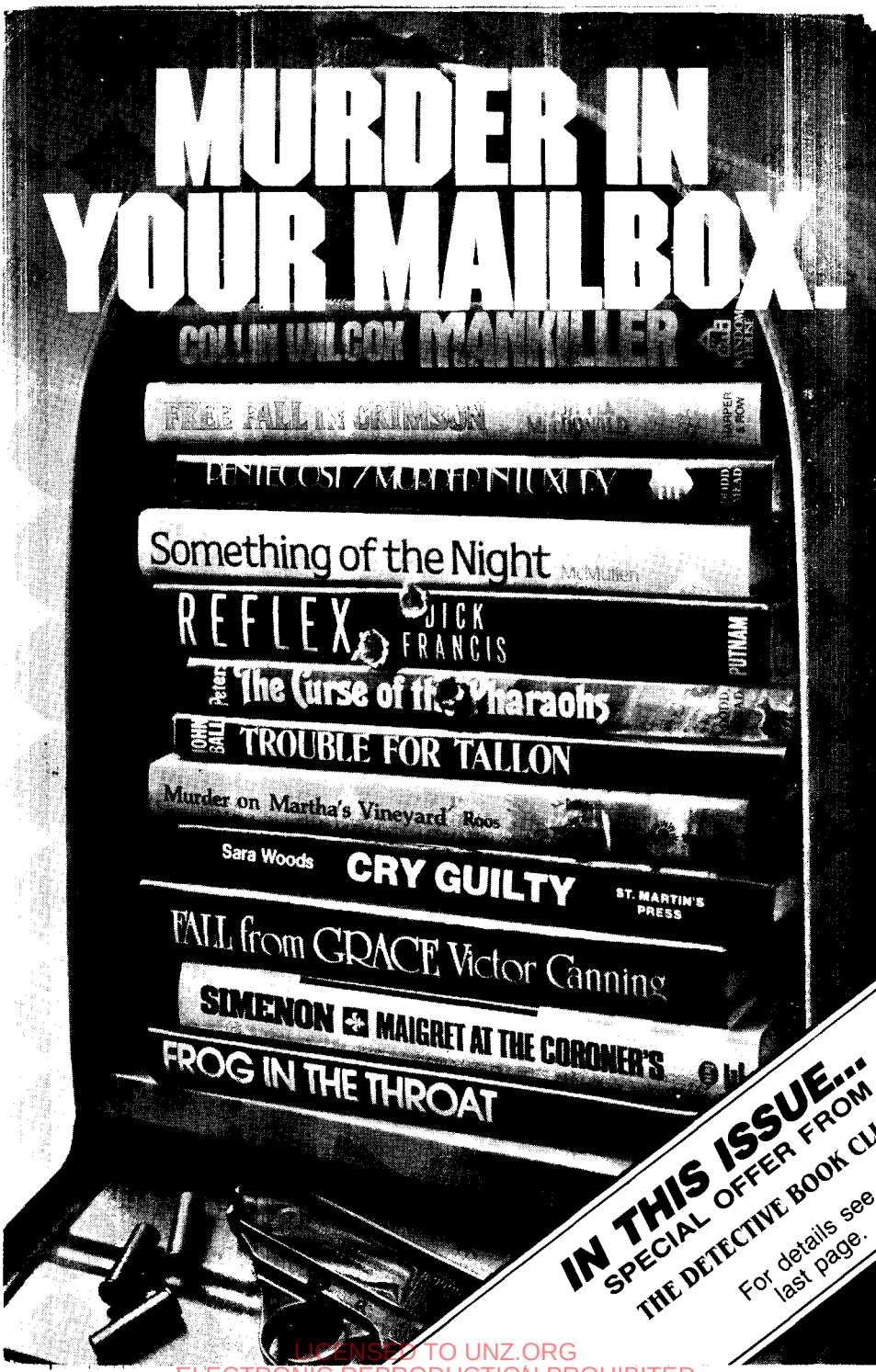
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